The Question of Choice and Meaning:
A Critical Examination of the Debate of Veiling through the Case of Tunisia

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ABSTRACT

Over-burdened by history and religious significance, hijab – the Islamic head cover for women – exemplifies one of the most controversial female attire of our time, with government ban imposed and lifted, triggering heated debate among intellectuals of different persuasions and exacerbating the so-called "clash of civilizations." The recent return of this practice with implications of tradition and identity among Muslim women in the Islamic world at large, even beyond the borders in Europe and the American continents, is a conspicuous phenomenon in itself, thus providing a site for critical examination as well as theoretical challenge. The current project is an interview-based research on the return of hijab among college students in Tunisia, a country often regarded as the most advanced Arab nation in terms of women's legal status and civil rights.

The focus is on the perceivable attitudes adopted and voiced by the Tunisian young people facing a contemporary moral dilemma under critical circumstances. The most influential factors are taken into consideration, including the persistent Orientalist representation of Islam, the force of new media in spreading and enforcing religion, and the relative absence of critical encouragement in the existing educational system. Based on empirical observations, I intend to reconsider the concept of 'personal choice' with the notion of 'practical reason' as a shared human capacity, and then suggest an ontological inquiry into the phenomenon of veiling as an activity with everyday implication for those concerned.

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摘要

伊斯兰教的面纱堪称为当今倍受争论的女性服饰。“文明的冲突”围绕着这一话题展开，各国政府针对这一现象制定相应政策，学术上因此而引发的争论更是数不胜数。今天面纱在不少回教国家和社区被年轻人重新拾起，形成了潮流和宗教结合的新现象，为一直以来的争论注入了新元素。在本文中通过分析这一新潮流在突尼斯亚这一最为女权的阿拉伯国家青年学生中引发的讨论，我希望对两个基本理论问题展开讨论。首先，就自由选择的意义而言，不少之前的文章认为只要没有外来的压逼，女性自主选择戴面纱就可以带来解放。然而通过突尼斯亚的例子我试图证明缺乏外界压力并不一定构成解放，而自主选择面纱同样可以带来压迫。借此我同时提出道德理性作为构成自由选择的必要条件。其次，通过对面纱的现象学意义的分析，我希望进一步挑战之前理论在处理这一实践时的认识论假设。

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CONTENTS

Introduction

"My idea in Orientalism is to use humanistic critique to open up the fields of struggle, to introduce a longer sequence of thought and analysis to replace the short bursts of polemical, thought-stopping fury that so imprison us in labels and antagonistic debate whose goal is a belligerent collective identity rather than understanding and intellectual exchange."

Edward Said, Orientalism(1978)[1]

"Knowing is a mode of Dasein founded upon Being-in-the-world. Thus Being-in-the-world, as a basic state, must be Interpreted beforehand."

Martin Heidegger, Being and Time (1927)[2]

According to an earlier report on France 2, the prominent French public TV channel, one eye-catching phenomenon has been spotted in Tunisia, one of its numerous ex-colonies in North Africa: the madams in the country, especially the young among them, are found returning enthusiastically to 'hijab'[3], the headscarf for Muslim

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[1] Edward Said, preface to *Orientalism*(New York: Vintage, 1994): xxii.

[2] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: SCM Press LTD, 1962): 90.

[3] The word 'hijab' in this thesis is used to refer to the modest head cover worn by Muslim women leaving only the face and hands uncovered. Two more popular English words 'veil' and 'headscarf' have been used interchangeably for convenience. Considering the complexity of situation regarding the dress and its naming the following clarification is necessary: first of all, the English word 'veil' can not at all contain the multiplicity of its usage in Arabic, which is based on detailed reading of religious cannon and concrete local custom of specific regions. According to some of my informants, proper dress code in Islam is associated with purity during prayer, which for men is the covering of the part from navel to knee, and for women is the whole body except the face and hands. This special requirement is associated with the concept of 'awrah, literally meaning genitals, referring to areas of the body which must remain covered to maintain modesty. Different interpretation on 'awrah can lead to different religious judgment on covering, and a strict interpretation can lead to requirement of full covering by dresses like niqab in Saudi Arabia and burqa in Afagnistan. See Gordon Newby, *A Concise Encyclopedia of Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2002): 35. Second, for the current case, the 'veil' is better considered as referring to a broad way of dress rather than any particular piece of dress, for it is the particular religious rules concerning the 'veil' that people are actually trying to follow in practice. In the case of Tunisia the color and material of the veils can change from one individual to another so long as the basic principle normally regarded as 'not tight, not transparent, not decorative' is observed. Whereas within such a definition of 'veil' women are gaining more freedom in dressing differently, a stricter definition (specifying requirements in color and form, as the case in Saudi Arabia) will reduce the room for fashion concerns, so to speak. Third, nomenclature for the covering can be quite confusing in an Islamic country due to influence from local custom and historical transformation. In Tunisia for instance, the hijab in the current study can also be called khmar and foulard (the French term for headscarf), differentiating itself from safsari (one type of traditional attire that covers the whole body, white in color, usually worn by elder women for convenience in daily activity outside, its male counterpart is called 'shashiyah', a red hat resembling fez) and the 'Tunisian headscarf' (yet another fashion slightly different from the 'hijab' by a knot under the chin). Since the government strictly bans 'hijab' to reinforce its secular policy while granting freedom for what it defines as 'traditional dress', the 'Tunisian headscarf' is usually adopted by the young women as strategy to enter public facilities and avoiding trouble from police on the streets. Finally, the naming is also associated with a person's general stance toward religion. Thus the practice of veiling can be commended as turning 'mutadayyanah'(meaning the faithful and pious in Tunisian dialect), 'muhtashimah' 'muhtaramah' 'mutawadu'h'(meaning in Arabic 'humility' 'respect' and 'modesty'), or be dismissively regarded as 'muta'assibah' (meaning religious fanatic) and 'hunjiya'(another name for the 'fanatic', with

women. Under the faithful filming of the French camera, what appears novel is a conspicuous new way of dressing that floods the main streets and crowded markets, adding a colorful yet uncertain tone to the secular dress code that has been dominating the country since its independence. This fashionable new outfit usually consists of a down-to-chest scarf covering the head, and myriad ways of matching it: ranging from long sleeved blouse, *jilbab* (a full-length robe wrapping the body loosely), to skinny jeans and up-to-toe long skirt, just to describe a few possible styles visible in public places. It seems that hijab, the controversial attire once strictly banned by the local government to reinforce its secular policy, is finally gaining a secure footing in the country. This change has been responded by passionate celebration among young followers of the new trend, as one of them expresses in the report: "thanks to God, things are getting better now that women are no longer prevented from exercising their personal choice." Yet for another young lady majoring in religious studies who happened to be the only one without scarf in her class, the growing hijab fad does not seem to be overwhelmingly positive, given its dubious correlation to one's genuine religiosity. As she puts it curtly during the interview: "whether to wear hijab or not is merely an issue between oneself and God".

The fashionable hijab embraced by young Tunisians is by no means a local vogue and its popularity is pan-Arab as well as international. Another recent documentary which appeared on "Al-jazeera", one of the most widely-watched TV channels in the Arabic-speaking Middle East, can serve as a handy illustration for the far-reaching influence of the new fad, raising perplexing questions as well. The documentary appeared as an insertion for a special religious lecture on hijab given by Yusuf Qaradawi, a renowned Egyptian Islamic scholar who is followed by a wide audience around the region. Presented as the authoritative response to the arising confusion about the correct way of wearing hijab and its religious implication, the talk of Imam Qaradawi is a detailed exposition on the necessity of wearing hijab. According to him, the wearing of hijab not only constitutes an indispensible religious obligation for Muslim women, but also embodies a crucial emblem by virtue of which the modesty cherished by Muslim women is clearly distinguished from the the pitiful status as sheer visual objects suffered by their western counterparts. Setting himself up as a moderate voice in the contemporary Islamic world, Qaradawi cautiously leaves niqab (a full covering of the whole body except the eyes, usually in black and worn together with a pair of gloves) for personal option, yet requires the wearing of hijab as a

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disparaging suggestion for 'narrow-mindedness' 'conservative in religious matters' or 'difficult to deal with'. Its masculine form is found more frequent in common usage, often alluding to people who grow beard in order to imitate the popular image of Prophet Mohammed and sticking firmly to religious cannon).

non-negotiable religious obligation clearly stipulated by the Qu'ran and Hadith. Nevertheless, even a quick glance at the following interview on the streets of Cairo can reveal the insurmountable difficulty of the eloquent Imam to put forward his admonition in reality. Unlike the ubiquitous *niqab* in Saudi Arabia or *burqa* in Iran, hijab on the streets from Cairo to Tunis today with infinite individual preferences for color, material and style can bewilder the observer, all rendering the Imam's attempt to regulate a "modest" dress code implausible. Given this increasingly stylish feature and highly idiosyncratic personal preference in the new hijab trend, the confusion around it appears inevitable, as the reporter puts it at the beginning of the interview: "the colorful hijab, the brown hijab, and the black loose hijab, all of them are hijabs provoking furious debate among various sides within Islamic society." To complicate the situation even further, according to the short interview, no two women on the street of Cairo are found in agreement with each other on the meaning of hijab. While some women are criticizing the current trend with indignation as running contrary to the modesty required by Islam, others are downplaying the importance of covering by comparing it with the true value of one's inner virtue; whereas some are convinced that 'hijab' is required by Islam with definite principles regarding how and why it is to be worn, some simply consider it as a mere way of dressing having dubious origin in religion. Given the flamboyant appearance of the new hijab and disparate opinions arising with it, it is not surprising that the reporter arrives at the conclusion, that "every woman now is wearing the hijab in a way she deems as suitable."

The new phenomenon reported by the documentary appears to be no more than an ordinary fashion among the young Arabs. Since all faddish objects come and go rapidly, it seems reasonable to conclude that no serious attention should be paid to it. However we will discover in our inquiry that the return of hijab is by no means merely a commonplace fad picked up by the young Muslims, for it has aroused heated debate among those concerned within the Islamic world and outside it. Further, current controversy around the dress has added new questions to the existing research of the garb of Muslim women, challenging the previous definition of personal choice and the early way of interpreting the veiling phenomenon.

Chapter One Background of the Research and Its Main Theoretical Questions

To begin our inquiry, in this chapter I will first introduce the political background of Tunisia relevant to the debate on *hijab*. After that, I am going to lay out briefly different opinions held by Tunisians today toward the return of hijab. Further, I will offer a critical review on some of the existing literature discussing the return of the veil inside both the Islamic and western countries. At the end of the chapter, I am going to propose two main theoretical questions I am going to deal with in this thesis.

1. New Features of the Hijab Trend and the Debate over it in Tunisia

The *hijab* worn by young Tunisians today is distinctively different from its historical predecessors in terms of its appearance. Further, the return of *hijab* among young Muslims is not a local trend confined to Tunisia but rather a global phenomenon.

In terms of appearance of the attire, it is relatively easy to distinguish the hijab on Tunisian street today from its historical predecessors, such as the white full-length *safsari* and the monochromatic hijab emerged in the 80s during the revival of Islamist movement in Tunisia. The hijab today looks not only more colorful but also more idiosyncratic for the observer, illustrating a variety of personal tastes and preferences. Unlike the hijab in the 80s, the followers of which demanded radical Islamilization of the country, the association, if any, between the hijab in Tunisia today and political Islam is quite loose. For some of my interviewees, politics hardly play any role in their choice of veiling, and they are concerned more with personal expression and standards of beauty rather than religious implications of the attire. Further, as we will see in my analysis of the interviews, that individual difference is found not only in the way of wearing the hijab, but also the interpretations developed by the informants for the attire. Since a collective political identity is not as clearly indicated in the current hijab as in the early one, there's more room for individuals now to have their own sayings on the meaning and reason of veiling.

This individualized hijab trend, as a recent phenomenon found on the rise among the young of the country, also has impact beyond the borders of Tunisia. Being an Arab country in terms of its history and language, Tunisia has a long-established political bond with other Arab countries, which allow news inside the country to travel fast to its Arab neighbors.[4]Further, according to many recent researches on the change of

[4] For instance, the Arabic site of 'Aljazeera' published an article earlier on the hijab ban in Tunisia, which has generated continuous response from people all over the Arab world, and majority of them criticized the Tunisian government for its lack of toleration in religious matters. See

dress code among young Muslims, the recent return of hijab is hardly a Tunisian-specific phenomenon, but rather a popular trend with wide influence within Muslim communities on the global scale.[5]

The new hijab, as shown above, is a highly individualized and globalized phenomenon. These new features presumably contribute to some identifiable new concerns for debates stirred up by the attire. For many early researches on veiling, one of the central issues has been women's status and their equal rights within Islam. Since the practice has been condemned for a long time by the West as institutional oppression for women, these researches find gender implication of veiling an unavoidable question to address. Some of them choose to defend the practice through exploring the unique view of Islam on gender issues, as well as complex theological implications for covering within Islam and other monotheist religions.[6] Even for those discussing the practice from a secular framework, the women's status in Islam remains a central issue to be clarified, if not defended.[7] Although women's status is still touched upon by current debate of veiling, it does not constitute the central concern for those joining the debate right now. For these works, the point of contention has been shifted from the question of equality to the question of personal choice. As we will see in literature review, the individual right of carrying out requirements of one's religion has replaced gender equality as the basic point of argument today. For defenders of the veiling now, what at issue has no longer been the treatment of women in Islam, but rather the relation between veiling and freedom of conscience. Admittedly, it is inevitable for any argument for the freedom of choosing

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http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/483DBB42-4776-4450-B92B-B35ED3A4325A.htm

[5] In *Gender, Islam and Democracy in Indonesia*, Kathryn M. Robinson mentioned the dress code among the young Indonesians are more conservative compared with that of previous generations, as way of expressing their Muslim identity. See Kathryn M. Robinson, *Gender, Islam and Democracy in Indonesia*(New York: Routledge, 2009): 119. In another research on the dress code of young Muslim immigrants in Canada, Homa Hoodfar also identifies the rise of more strict form of veil among the young, possibly linked with the prevailing prejudice against Islam and Muslims after 9/11, and other fitting problems shared by the immigrants. For details see Sajida Alvi et al, ed., *The Muslim Veil in North America: Issues and Debates* (Toronto: Women's Press, 2003).

[6] In her influential work *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in a Modern Muslim Society*, Fatima Mernissi proposes a positive reading on '*fitna*', a central concept used usually as justification for veiling. According to her, to require veiling out of fear for '*fitna*' can also be considered as admitting the hidden subversion of female sexuality. The similar exploration on the 'hidden empowering message' of veiling can also be found in the work of Alfa Youssuf, , in which she associates veiling with idea of invisibility in Islam. According to her, since God is the most powerful figure invisible, the ideology of covering can also be read as granting Muslim women the spiritual sacredness through making them invisible.

[7] For works in this kind, please refer to Leila Ahmed, Women *and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992). M.M. Charrad. "Cultural Diversity within Islam: Veils and Laws in Tunisia," in *Women in Muslim Societies: Diversity within Unity,* ed. Herbert L.Bodman and Nayereh Tohidi(Boulder: Rienner, 1998). Zahra, Kamalkhani, *Women's Islam: Religious Practice among Women in Today's Iran* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

the veil to first define what veiling is, and in some cases, whether it is a necessary religious obligation in Islam, and the fairness of making such a requirement if it is. Yet it must also be noticed that such inescapable referring to the gender implications of veiling is already not the same with making the gender issue a crucial point of debate. For the argument over whether Muslim women, as citizens with rights, should be allowed to pick up the veil through their free choice, neither is the concrete religious requirement in this regard a central concern, nor the direct relation between treatment of women and veiling, if any. In our later analysis of the question of choice and its accompanied moral dilemma, we will develop this point further.

Before reviewing on the recent discussion on the hijab, I will first briefly outline the debate over this new fashion inside Tunisia, so that it can be used as a reference point for comparing cases mentioned later in other studies. Besides, such a general introduction of the current public debate in Tunisia is also helpful to locate specific cases I am going to use later in chapter two during further development of my main arguments. In order to facilitate the reading, I have classified the existing points of view into three groups according to the political affiliation of the people concerned and differences in their opinions held. However, given the complexity of debate and nuanced differences in individual stances, the division is by no means exhaustive, and overlaps should be expected to be found between groups.

- **The Tunisian government**:

Ever since its independence, Tunisia has devoted to the modernization process: it succeeded in achieving steady economic growth on an annual basis, providing first-rate, public-funded education till college level for its citizens, and curbing efficiently the religious extremism within the country. When it comes to women's position, Tunisia is arguably one of the most advanced Arab countries, where the female citizens are not only offered full legal rights in all aspects, but are granted certain privileges that are not shared yet by many of its European counterparts.[8]

Setting itself up as the firm devotee of modernization and the faithful guardian of women's rights, the Tunisian government always finds hijab, as a symbol loaded with religious connotation, vexingly unsettling, if not totally out of place within its

[8] The leading role played by Tunisia in regard of women's legal rights among its Arab counterparts is truly commendable, which can be illustrated by the following facts: Tunisian female is able to transmit their citizenship to offspring recently, a right that is granted to women in U.K. only in 1980s, and a new measure put into effect in 2006 allows mother to work part-time for two-third of their salary remained, while retaining full rights in terms of retirement and social security, see Andrew Jeffreys, ed., *The Report: Tunisia 2009*(Tunisia: Oxford Business Group: 2009): 19.

demarcated secular framework of development. Ever since the country's independence in 1956, the government has made securing the secular rights of women one cornerstone of the nation's development scheme. In this regard, the ex-president Habib Bourguiba first laid down *Code of Personal Status,* a special amendment to the family laws of *shari'a*, as the bedrock for enhancing women's social status, whereby women are protected against polygamy, unilateral divorce and male guardianship. This pro-feminist legislative tradition has been furthered by his successor, the current president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. Among his recent political achievements, Ben Ali has introduced reforms regarding mother's rights of passing the citizenship to the offspring, improved the working condition for the female workers, and provided the divorced women with more working privileges.

Given such pro-secular political agenda of Tunisia, it is predictable that the government casted an unfavorable eye on women's covering throughout the country's national history.[9] The full-length covering popular in the pre-independence era was discouraged by Bourguiba soon after the country's won of its autonomy from the hand of French, signifying his resolution toward modernizing the nation.[10] The hijab in our

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[9] This comment is drawn based on the overall political attitude held by the government in this regard. However, a further investigation will reveal that, women's covering in Tunisia has a twisted fate through the modern era due to political manipulations imposed on it. Back to the country's colonial era, covering of women was first condemned by the French colonizers as suggesting a 'lamentable backwardness of culture', and consequently defended by Bourguiba, the national leader then, as the unbreakable icon for Tunisian identity. See Nadia Nadja Mamelouk, "Anxiety in the Border Zone: Transgressing Boudaries in Leila: revue illustrée de la femme (Tunis, 1936-1940) and in Leïla: Hebdomadaire Tunisien Indépendant (Tunis, 1940-1941)"(PhD diss., unpublished):164. The debate between colonizers and nationalists at this period is the presumably the earliest contention stirred by women's covering inside the country. At the same time, another nationalist named Tahar Hadad published a controversial book, arguing against the veiling on the grounds of its imposed huge inconvenience on the modern way of living, and its basic incompatibility with the modern spirit as he defines it. According to Hadad, being modern is synonymous with pursuing the life-style of petite-bourgeoisie, which was popular among European countries he deeply admired. For English translation of Hadad's book, see Ronak Husni and Daniel L.Newman, tran., *Muslim Women in Law and Society: Annotated translation of al-Tahir al-Haddad's Imra'tuna fi 'l-shari'a wa 'l-myjtama', with an introduction*(New York: Routledge, 2007). Because of his overt support for the French opposition against veiling, Hadad was condemned by the nationalists at his time as sympathizer of the colonial bureau, and died with his radical arguments largely unheard by the general public. Nevertheless, the basic ideas expressed by Hadad have ironically influenced one of his contemporary opponents, Habib Bourguiba, who later launched a nation-wide reform against covering during his presidency. Largely inspired by Qasim Amin(an Egyptian nationalist who initiated the very first debate on veiling in the modern age) and his earlier attack on veiling Hadad uncritically followed Amin's misleading associating veiling with comparison of cultural superiority. Although the social effects of veiling are disputable, it is another issue to compare the superiority of culture through referring to the practice. For a powerful critique for such cultural comparison in debates on veiling, see Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992):144-188.

[10] Inspired by Ataturk's reform in Turkey, Bourguiba has adopted a pro-secular stance in his planned national reform. Compared with the moderate policy of his successor, president Bourguiba's reform is way more rigid in terms of its treatment of religion. Historical records suggest Bourguiba not only kept secularization his guiding principle of reform, but also got intimately involved in observing his held

discussion first appeared in Tunisia at the beginning of 1980s, which witnessed a short revival of Islamist movement within the country. The hijab back to then symbolized political solidarity with the Islamist faction during the political upheaval. Alarmed by such close relation between veiling and the political Islamism, the Tunisian government subsequently promulgated a regulative act prohibiting hijab in all public places. [11] Although recent development seems to suggest loosening of the governmental ban over headscarf, sporadic censorships experienced by some veiled women reveals a somehow ambivalent attitude of Tunisian government in this regard. [12]

For our current case, the stance of Tunisian government on hijab has a direct influence on those concerned. This is so especially with some of the veiled who claim to rebel against what they consider as 'unfair treatment of religion' and 'loss of faith' in the country's ban of hijab. In this regard we can raise the following question around the stance of Tunisian government mentioned above: considering the country's effort in making laws in favor of women's rights, the government seems to have reinforced human rights within the secular framework. Yet, if it is so, how should we conceive accusation from the veiled that the government has infringed their right of practicing the religion? Indeed, if the right of a citizen is adequately conceived and fully granted, is it supposed to include the right of observing the requirements of one's religion, so long as the required practice does not interfere with more crucial interests of the public? Surely the government may justify the ban on the account of curbing the

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beliefs himself: he was the one who symbolically lifted the hijab of Tunisian women after the country's establishment, and also the one who breaks the rule of fasting in Ramadan in a high-profile gesture. See Fred Halliday, "The Politics of Islamic Fundamentalism: Iran, Tunisia and the challenge to the secular state", in *Islam, Globalization and Postmodernity*, ed. Akbar S. Ahmed and Hastings Donnan(New York: Routledge, 2004): 102-109.

[11] The hijab ban has been constantly criticized by NGOs inside the country as violation of democracy and infringement on human rights, see Khedija Sharif, *A Setback to Women's Rights in Tunisia*, http://www.humanrights-geneva.info/spip.php?article3002.

[12] The following two reports indicate a nuanced change in the Tunisian government's recent stance toward the earlier hijab ban: back to 2006, in its response to outside criticism for its hijab ban, the Tunisian government called the headscarf the 'sectarian dress imported from the gulf' , thus alien to the Tunisian tradition as it defines it. See Daniel Lav,, The War Over the Veil in Tunisia, http://www.nawaat.org/portail/2006/11/23/the-war-over-the-veil-in-tunisia/. Yet in last year's annual report, the government complicated the situation by on the one hand, ruling out the *niqab* as usual, and on the other, claiming to support all kinds of 'Tunisian scarves'. See Andrew Jeffreys, ed., *The Report: Tunisia 2009*(Tunisia: Oxford Business Group: 2009): 10. Since the 'Tunisian scarf' thus defined makes no detailed distinction between existing kinds of covering, the government can therefore justify its sporadic censorship on the headscarf. Although none of my veiled informants has reported having trouble with the their scarves, some reports on 'al-mauqif' (a local weekly newspaper, famous for its sharp political critique) suggest otherwise: in one case, a female teacher was under the headmaster's special summon presumably due to her headscarf, and in several other cases one veiled student was denied by the registration office, one deprived the opportunity of receiving her won prize in a public occasion, and another expelled from her school. See 'al-mauqif' on Jul 11, 2008, Oct.10, 2008, Dec 19, 2008.

religious extremism, yet in that case we can still question how the veiling is ideologically associated with the religious extremism as it defines it. These considerations are crucial because they lead to a central theme of the current debate on veiling, personal choice and its complex implications for the matter of veiling. As we will see in the later analysis, that both for the defenders and opponents of the practice, the definition of personal choice is subject to constant dispute.

- **Feminists**:

Given that a large amount of existing literature on the Muslim veiling has touched the gender implication of the practice, I will therefore make the opinions of Tunisian feminists I have interviewed into an independent section, so that these opinions can be read in parallel with arguments made by other Muslim feminists in the literature review.

Before entering into detailed cases of these feminists, it is helpful to have a quick look at the historical development of feminism in Tunisia, so that the stories told by my informants can be better understood within the current circumstance of discussion. The beginning of feminism in Tunisia, like the case with many postcolonial countries, was closely connected with the agenda of the nationalist movement to cast a modern image for the newly-independent nation. Consequently although the Tunisian nationalist leaders promoted feminist agenda in law and social practice soon after the independence, there has never been any bottom-up feminist movement in the country. Back to the 50s, the first generation of feminists in the country were subject to direct dictation from the one-party government, having little chance of addressing women's issues outside the framework demarcated by the male nationalists. [13]It is only a matter of recent years that individual feminists find themselves more space for having independent voice in controversial matters like veiling. As the following cases will suggest, the stance taken by individuals from different era, with different persuasion can vary significantly from one case to another, although in general all of them agree on the worth of pursuing gender justice and commit themselves sincerely to the betterment of women's conditions within the country.

Prof. Khedija Arfaoui is a typical first generation feminist who believes that the veiling is overwhelmingly an oppressive institution, thus incompatible with the pursuit of gender equality. [14]Now in her seventies, Khedija still finds herself at total

[13] For a general introduction of the feminist movement in Tunisia, please refer to Khedija Arfaoui, "The Development of the Feminist Movement in Tunisia 1920s-2000s," *International Journal of the Humanities* vol. 4, no. 8(2007): 53-59.

[14] Interview taken in Aug 2009 at Tunis, Tunisia.

ease with the secular dress code laid down by the government back in her youth, seeing it as a hard-won privilege achieved by efforts of her generation of social activists. The way Khedija dressed up during our first meeting was telling: sleeveless white skirt with a pair of crimson high wheels; she looked assertive and high-spirited despite an unfortunate involvement earlier in a controversial political scandal.[15]When it comes to the recent soaring of fashionable hijab on the street, Khedija briefly commented it as the new fad among the young, which is superficial and transient, or as she put it: "let's wait for another 30 years and see if it is going to last." According to her personal observation, the zeal of the young today for the new hijab is somehow understandable given the popularity of the dress among young Muslims global-wide, presumably resulted from critical circumstances facing the Muslim community right now. Yet, having witnessed herself the pitiful confinement women like her grandmother suffering under full-veiling before the country's independence, Khedija is completely convinced that the religious requirement of covering, be it by hijab or niqab, is always suspicious of curtailing women's gained rights in a country like Tunisia.

Unlike Khedija who considers the question of equality from the framework of secularism, Amel, another prominent feminist scholar in the country, considers it important to derive the gender justice from teachings of Islam.[16]Amel belongs to another generation of younger feminists, for whom the revival of Islamic movement in the country during the 80s played a mind-shaping impact. In Amel's own words: "the Islamic perspective on women's issues could no longer be overlooked if one wanted to defend the established gender order from accusations of Islamists back to then." As a university professor in Comparative Religion Amel revealed to me her growing worry about the lethargy her students showed toward joining critical discussions on religious matters. For her the current hijab fad is resulted from the overwhelming religious preaching on the new media, and most of these religious sermons are preying on the emotional attachment that many young people have toward religion. According to Amel, the public education in Tunisia offers little in critical thinking and liberal religious education. This makes her worry that the students, when poorly prepared for discerning the bad arguments from the good ones in matters of religion, are more likely to be susceptible to the misleading preaching on the mass media today. As she recalled in one case, some of her graduate students refused to answer questions concerning Nawal Saadawi(an Egyptian activist famous

[15] For report on her case, please refer to http://www.ifex.org/tunisia/2009/07/10/arfaoui_sentenced/.
[16] Interview taken in Aug, 2009 at Tunis, Tunisia. For another interview received by Amel earlier the year see http://sjpaderborn.wordpress.com/2009/08/08/interview-with-amel-grami-onward-to-a-modern-islam/.

for her radical criticism on the misogynist practices inside Islam) during the exam for the reason that 'Nawal is a treacherous infidel', and on their answer sheets these students further condemned the feminist movement as being the "enemy of Islam". "I call them the generation of hearsay. They do not read, and the only way they get their views on Islam is through listening to the Imams on media or chatting with their peers", commented Amel during our interview, showing a great concern for the deterioration of humanistic literacy among the young Tunisians today. For those fresh graduates the job market inside the country is direly saturated, and one main alternative for many used to be immigrating to Europe. [17] Yet according to Amel, since recently most European countries have made the immigration process harder than before, many young students have lost their hope of 'finding the way out'; the resort to religion becomes the natural option remained for those in despair of unemployment. It is Amel's deep worry that such unoptimistic situation has further hindered the rational debate among students on religious matters, since those taking refuge in religion are likely to hold an unquestioning attitude toward preaching received. Without adequate grasp of the religious texts and critical reading of verses concerning the practice, most of the veiled college students, as Amel considers it, are not really practicing Islam through putting up the veil; discrepancy between one's alleged religiosity and actual conducts exist widely among these ardent followers of the new fashion.

Similar to Amel, professor Labidi is another prominent feminist in Tunisia cares greatly about women's issue, especially the legal protection for the gender equality. [18] Being a productive author for books on feminist history and women's conditions inside the country, Labidi considers herself a devoted activist opposing all sorts of infringement on women's rights in the name of religion.[19] Yet, quite different from her college Amel who finds the return of hijab disconcerting, Labidi seems to hold a more understanding stance toward the veiling of her students. Like Amel, as a teacher Labidi noticed the rising hypocrisy of some veiled and disconcerted by it profoundly. Yet she also believes that many of her students choose to veil out of sincerity of their spiritual quest, which is worthy of sympathy and respect. For Labidi the policy carried

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[17] The remarkable achievement in public education aside, Tunisia is burdened by a high unemployment rate among its young population. According to a recent report the overall unemployment rate inside the country was one out of ten, and for the college graduates the figure rises up to 42.5%, which is much higher than that of its neighbors like Morocco and Algeria. See Andrew Jeffreys, ed., *The Report: Tunisia 2009*(Tunisia: Oxford Business Group: 2009):200.

[18] Interview taken in Aug, 2009 at Tunis, Tunisia.

[19] For publication of prof. Labidi, see Lilia Labidi, "Islamic Law: Feminism and Family: the Reformation of Hudud in Egypt and Tunisia," in *From patriarchy to empowerment : women's participation, movements, and rights in the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia*, ed. Valentine M. Moghadam(New York. : Syracuse University Press, 2007).

out by the Tunisian government regarding veiling is both whimsical and draconian, making no distinction between the few religious extremists and the large number of law-abiding believers. Hence she is willing to help some of her students getting into trouble because of the veil, out of respect and understanding for their just need to observe the religion. However, considering the government's unfavorable policy in this regard, she sees little point in getting into unnecessary troubles with the veil. Personally Labidi believes that it is understandable that one wants to express the sincerity of faith in God through veiling, yet for her the sticking to veil is unworthy of costing one the opportunity of taking crucial exams, or in some cases, the right to enter the college. In one case one of her dear students started veiling a while ago, refusing to take off the scarf even during the exam (according to regulations of most Tunisian universities, the veil is not allowed inside the exam room), and Labidi attempted at times to dissuade the student from her stubbornness, worrying that it might lead to undesirable results like failing the exam and repeating one whole year.

Difference in personal evaluation of the phenomenon aside, the three Tunisian feminists have in common the overriding concern for women's social status and rights. It is their shared common ground that the actual political rights of women should not be reduced nor tramped by the religious requirement of veiling, nor the government's control over it. Starting with this basic point, we can then arrive at some questions under heated debate, such as whether it is possible to reconcile between the Islamic requirement of covering with the secular understanding of human rights, and whether it is possible to reach middle ground between the individual liberty of practicing the religion, and the national interest of controlling religious extremism. In our current case, there is another more interesting problem as pointed out by the previous comments on veiling, namely, what can be counted as the real practicing of veiling, and how it is going to be differentiated from the superficial, or even blind following of the fashion, as Amel seems to worry about. All these are crucial points deserving further scrutiny if we are aiming at a thorough examination of the hijab trend in Tunisia and its theoretical implications. As we will soon discover from other existing discussion on the phenomenon inside Tunisia, many non-feminist scholars are also complaining about the dissembling behaviors of the veiled, identifying it as a vexing social problem plaguing the young population today. Now let's move to more details on how the question is raised in other discussions.

Others:

First of all, it is necessary for me to make some remarks on the general religious background of the country, so that the stances held by interviewees in this section can

be understood against this larger background. From our previous introduction on the Tunisian government's firm stance against the veiling, we can infer that the political influence of Islam in Tunisia is largely limited, compared with the situation in other Arab countries in the region such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia, where the Islamic law bear more direct influence on the life of the citizens. Yet insofar as the country's major religion and customs are considered, Tunisia is undoubtedly an Islamic country where up to 98 percent of its population identifying themselves as Muslim. Islamic rituals such as five times pray, annual fasting and traditional Islamic festivals are observable for visitors to the country. Besides, located on the south coast of Mediterranean Sea, the country has experienced intimate cultural exchange with its European and Arab neighbors along its long history, which has definitely contributed to the tolerance and open-mindedness of many Tunisians today toward religious matters. Historically this peaceful tiny land lying behind the Carthage beach has been ruled by Berbers, Phoenicians, Romans, Arabs, and Ottomans; co-existence with other civilizations and religions therefore constitutes a historical necessity to be handled skillfully by residents of this land. As one of my Tunisian friends once commented, that one will immediately fall into great puzzle once start to ask what is to be a Tunisian, given that this very identity has been subject to countless mixture and fusion between different peoples and cultures drawn to this land.

My contact with ordinary Tunisians during the field trip suggests that the viewpoints people held toward the return of hijab is different from one case to another, showing tremendous diversity depending on the religious upbringing and political inclination of individual. Here 'others' is used as a handy label that covers a wide range of opinions from the people I encountered: from liberal intellectuals holding secular stance against the 'interference' of religion to those sticking to more rigid reading of religious scripture, from those espousing the liberal religious reform to adherents to the rule of religion in all spheres of life. Their expressed opinions can neither be subsumed under the official stance held by the Tunisian government, nor the relatively distinctive position held by the feminist group, offering a complicated set of data conducive to our further philosophical investigation.

On one end of this spectrum we encounter university professors like Mohammad who considers veiling as the new way the young developed among themselves toward mutual attraction, and to veil is aimed at alluring the marriageable male through advertising one's piety.[20] Although privately he scoffs at the wide spread of hypocrisy of the veiled and disproves the correlation between the outfit and one' inner virtue, he

[20] Interview taken in Aug, 2009 at Tunis, Tunisia.

is willing to be more tolerant with his veiled students in the class so long as they do not divert the attention of other audience from his lecture. A similar view is shared by Ahmed, one of Mohammad's colleagues, who not only denies any moral content expressed by veiling, but considers the practice as the misinterpretation of Qu'ran.[21] For him, Qu'ran only uses the word 'hijab' to signify the spiritual barrier between God Muslims, between prophet Mohammed and the reminder of believers, which has been wrongly understood by some as precepts for the way of dressing.[22]In addition, he further argues for the overriding importance of *niyah*(meaning the 'good will'), which alone defines the real virtue. The young Tunisians' sticking to hijab is mocked by Ahmed as superficial and dogmatic, and for him there is noting external that can be compared with the good will behind one's behavior.

Contrary to the sharp criticism aforementioned, the wearing of hijab is considered as clearly dictated by Islam, thus obligatory for all Muslim women with another group of teachers. For Amad, a professor in social science, the veiling of Muslim women frees women from the lustful look of male in the public places. As he sees it, Islam makes indisputable requirement regarding women's proper way of dressing, and whoever chooses to pick up the veil should discipline herself in the daily life to represent the

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[21] Interview taken in Aug, 2009 at Tunis, Tunisia.

[22] In Quran, the word 'hijab', as the most common word used (both by Islamic jurists and average Arab-Muslim) for headscarf, is actually never mentioned jointly with the covering of women. 'Hijab' in Arabic stems from the verb 'hajaba', the original meaning of which is 'to set a barrier between two things', or to 'block something from the sight'. Its use in Quran seems to suggest the spiritual distinction between the believer and the unbeliever(in surah/chapter 17 verse 45 by saying 'when thou dost recite the Quran, we put, between thee and those who believe not in the thereafter, a veil invisible), and the essential difference in terms of the relation to God between prophet Mohammad and other Muslims(indicated in surah 41 verse 5, that 'between us and thee is a hijab, so do you go your way and we shall go ours'). The word is also to remind the theological inequality between God and human, as it is put in surah 42 verse 51, that 'it is not fitting for a man that Allah should speak to him except by inspiration, or from behind a hijab.' Insofar as women's covering is concerned, the controversy is actually over two places in Quran. The first one is surah 14 verse 31, which requires the believing women to 'lower their gaze and guard their modesty, that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what must ordinarily appear, and to draw their veils (the word here mentioned is 'khmar', as certain kind of modest dress for women) over their bosoms and not display their beauty except for the unmarriageable male relatives. The second is the surah 33 verse 59, where the God mentions that 'prophet, tell your wives and daughters, and the believing women, that they should cast their 'jilbab'(a loose wrapping cloth for women) over their persons for convenience.' The contending point here is mainly about, in the first case, how does the word 'khmar', as the suggested modest dress, actually look like. The scripture is obscure on this matter since it did not mention exactly what body parts to be covered except the bosoms, and therefore different Islamic schools resulted in making different requirements of women's covering (for instance, the Malik school, which is the dominant Islamic school in Tunisia and Egypt requires women to leave the face and hands uncovered; whereas in Salafi school of Saudi, the rule of covering is interpreted more rigidly to include the whole body of women.) The second point of contention is whether the requirement to veil is made to the wives of Mohammad only or all Muslim women in general. While some Islamic scholars like Yusuf Qaradawi considers the veilingt as obligatory for all Muslim women, Muslim feminists like Fatima Mernissi renders it as referring exclusively to the wives of prophet, and therefore can not be imitated by the remainder of believers. See Fatima Mernissi, *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry*(Oxford: Blackwell, 1991):85-101.

ideal of Islamic morality. Being asked about the potential disadvantage facing the veiled under the country's current policy, Amad shows adamant support for the veiled by quoting verses from *Hadith*, suggesting that those sticking to their faith under the hardship will be rewarded thereof. The Tunisian society is seen by Amad as falling astray from the ideal Islamic society governed by *sha'ria*, or the Islamic law, and the current return to hijab is viewed by him as foreshadowing the recovery of faith, which has been subject to severe suppression over the years.

As for the university students, my target group in the inquiry, the opinions they held about veiling are less polarized compared to that of the teachers, and a sympathetic siding with religion is found common in nearly all cases. Before going into the more detailed account of interviews with the students, a general introduction for their profiles is needed. The students I have contacted during the field trip were all studying in the Tunis city, the country's capital, where a number of prestigious colleges are gathered. With their age ranging from 18 to 30, these students came from different majors and included both graduates and undergraduates. Although we met each other in the capital city, these students were natives to different provinces of the country, and some even came from regions in the far south for better employment opportunities in Tunis. In terms of methodology I have included opinions from men and the unveiled. This arrangement turns out to be quite fruitful through challenging one 'commonsensical assumption' I had before the field trip, namely, the veiled would have unique insight into the practice and its implication due to their first-hand experience. Yet the result of my interviews suggests otherwise: the stance of the veiled is not only undistinguishable from that of the rest (men and unveiled), but it is almost incomprehensible without perspectives of men and the unveiled serving as complements. For instance, the wearing of hijab is considered by the veiled and unveiled alike as a religious duty, and the constant worry about being called hypocrites among some veiled can not be understood if it is not read alongside with the bitter complaint from some men about the dissembling behavior of their veiled girlfriends. Considering this interlocking relation between discourses of different groups I am not going to make specific distinction of the interviewee's status, and will use data from the veiled, unveiled and the men jointly to illustrate the points of discussion. Further, given my main interest in the philosophical reflection on questions brought by the current debate, rather than the pure sociological survey of existing opinions or ethnographic study of the dress per se, I will exempt myself from some irrelevant elaboration on details for individual cases, which appear to serve better for anecdotal entertainment rather than rigid analysis. Finally, as for the objectivity of the collected data, my way of choosing the interviewees (mainly

through the snow-ball effect, starting from friends I have already known before the trip), degrees of acquaintance with them, and their respective personal background such as place of birth, majors in college and economic status admittedly have their respective influence on my observation, and to some extent, my reports on it. Nevertheless, as we shall see later, inasmuch as the debate on veiling is concerned the discourse people are able to develop is much more decided by factors like the general political environment, the religious interpretations they find available and most importantly, adequacy of critical thinking, rather than the variant personal status and conditions.

Since analysis of cases of the college students will comprise a major part of our investigation, for the time being I shall give a sketchy review for their main arguments, so that they can be viewed in a joint light with the earlier stances of the government, the feminists, and the university professors. First of all, for all the students I have interviewed the wearing of hijab is considered as an incontestable religious obligation, with clear theological reference in *Quran*. The most frequent reason given to support this point is the infallibility and absolute benevolence of God, who, as believed by many, offers both the ultimate reason for being modest and the final punishment for those who fail to observe it. Although the understanding of how God interacts with the believers is exhibited as different between individuals, it is held in common that God should always remain the final judge in matters concerning veiling, and no person or Muslim is offered the equivocal right to coerce another person or Muslim into this practice. Similarly, for many nor can any Muslim's intentional disobedience of the divine order through her unveiling reduce the absolute truthfulness in God's requirement for covering and modesty. Second, when it comes to the moral hypocrisy many see the necessity of making distinction between those veiling out of religious learning and conviction, and those using the headscarf for sheer pragmatic ends, in terms of the different retribution they will receive from God. Third, all agreed that veiling is a choice to be made by women themselves, and for the veiled the individual consent is of specific importance, for it serves the best proof against later apostasy. Finally, for these young students to veil is not a mere action defined by one's putting on a headscarf. Rather, the practice suggests a whole set of rules that every veiled woman must follow, and a cluster of socially-valued behaviors that one is expected to observe. The gender-related regulations make up a large promotion of these regulations and they are defined with different degree of rigidness: for some it is acceptable to mix with men in public so long as the code of modesty is observed, and for some it is not real Islamic unless the Saudi-like gender segregation is performed in all public facilities.

For the first two points, the preceding arguments seem intuitively appealing, and can be easily taken as the ordinary vindication given by believers for veiling from a religious standpoint, or even a mere theological representation of the practice. This is likely to be the case if the reader shares with me a secular upbringing in the case of which transcendent arguments like this may sound distant and cryptic. Yet the key information revealed by 'the believer's saying' is of fundamental significance for our inquiry into the real implications of veiling. Notwithstanding its cliché-like outlook, the defense of veiling through a transcendent being is not to be overlooked, since it offers the clue for a new way of interpreting the practice, whereby it is treated not as a mere presentation but rather a phenomenon with ontological significance for those concerned. When defending the veiling, these students are referring to God and *Quran* constantly. Yet it will be too simplistic if we conceive such reference merely as embodiment of Islamic teaching or indication of individual piety. Surely an Islamic environment is pre-requisite for the basic acquaintance with Islamic canons, and the personal devotion to religion might serve a strong motivation for veiling in some cases. However to therefore attribute the practice to the existing religious influence and personal religiosity will prevent us from seeing the more fundamental significance of veiling, which can only be disclosed when we approach the question of religious background in the right manner. In the later part of the thesis I will further explain how the religious background as lived by the veiled can be interpreted in the right manner, and why it is important to prioritize such interpretation over any isolated reading of the veiling. As I shall argue later, the inquiry into the ontological significance of veiling is needed if the religious influence is to be understood rightly as reality. By the same token, insofar as personal piety is concerned the ontological interpretation of one's final 'for-the-sake-of-which' (a term to be analyzed in later discussion) is needed if it is not to be passed as the common kind of loyalty or fanaticism.

Whereas for the latter two points, the main question concerned is more thematically associated with the existing discussion on Muslim women's veiling, as well as our proposal to offer a critical examination on the discussion. Whether women are allowed to have a choice over the covering and whether veiling implies prejudice against the female body are heated questions addressed repeatedly in debates over the attire. The question concerning personal choice constitutes the central theme for arguments from different persuasions: when it comes to the current debate over the attire it is unavoidable to touch questions such as whether women are free in choosing the veil and what standard is adopted in judging a choice as truly free. In this regard

many of us intuitively agree that personal consent is pre-requisite for any choice, and for many Taliban's draconian demand on veiling is unacceptable since it allows little room for any personal consent of women involved, at least from the view of observers. Since personal consent is related to some valued human rights such as individual dignity and self-determination, it is comparatively easy to reach common ground in this regard. As we have already seen all my interviewees agreed that a woman should be allowed to make the final decision no matter how good the behavior is conceived inside Islam. The issue becomes more complicated when it comes to the appropriate role of government in the matter of veil: whether it is justifiable for a government to ban veiling if the practice is defined as incompatible with the prevailing protocols of a society. This raises another consideration over the question of choice, namely, isn't the ban of veil infringing the same right of consent of those convinced of the religious necessity of covering? This is a crucial question deserving due discussion and I will come back to it later when discussing the French ban over headscarf and face-veil. At this point I will move on to the personal justification given by the individual for the practice and its position in defining a real choice, for this is more closely connected with my current research interest. As we shall soon see, for some people the choice is free so long as it is absent from external coercion (both physical and mental) and the person concerned can somehow justify what she chooses. Accordingly veiling is judged as free so long as woman concerned are not forced into it and capable of making certain justification for the practice at the same time. This is so with the majority of discussions on this matter, for which the individual reasons for veiling is secondary in defining the choice. Choice thus defined is more about the institutional arrangement rather than individual feeling or reasoning. This is so both with those arguing for the neutral stance of government when it comes to the liberty of conscience, thus leaving the issue to be decided by citizens themselves, as well as those opposing veiling on the account of its implied oppression for women, which, according to these opponents, is systematic to the religious ideology behind. To consider the question at the macro level is undoubted necessary for defining the proper political policy regarding veiling, and the answer to this question is crucial to any political community since it decides the basic rights and liberty citizens inside the community are actually entitled to when it comes to religious practice. After all, it will be pointless to expect the rational justification from the individuals for their chosen practice if the liberty of conscience is absent under the governmental ban denying any room for choice in the first place. It is equally unreasonable to expect a fair performance of critical thinking in individual cases when the freedom of speech is not institutionally protected within one's community, and in that case a daring criticism may incur real danger for the outspoken speaker. Therefore, the grand debate on the

proper treatment of religion is rightly emphasized by preceding research as the central point of contention.

In the current paper I am going to launch an inquiry on the individual justifications for veiling, especially, if it is reasonable to expect a more rational justification for one's veiling and consider it as necessary for defining the choice as truly free for the person concerned. According to the preceding analysis, surely it is desirable to be free from cohesion when it comes to a practice as sensitive as veiling, and for defenders of the right of veiling, the governmental protection for the liberty of conscience is considered more appropriate than interventional measures like banning, perhaps rightly so. Yet when it comes to individual cases, is there any more to be said about personal reasoning and its influence on one's actual carrying out of a free choice? In earlier researches, the personal reasons for veiling are either treated as secondary due to its triviality, or merely used as evidence for the grander analysis of the social function of veiling. These individual accounts are seldom examined independently in terms of their rigidness of reasoning and consistency with other existing argument, yet this does not at all render these self-accounts unproblematic or unworthy of careful examination. A closer look shall reveal that taken as a whole the personal discourses on veiling are, like many other unexamined daily talks, subject to varying and sometimes conflicting influence in one's concrete environment; as a result, the logical inconsistency and flaws in reasoning abound. As we shall see in my later analysis for individual cases from my conducted interview, when being asked to give an account of the reasons of veiling, the discourse one develops freely is far from coherent in general arguments and well-examined in terms of the assumptions made. For instance, one may on the one hand aspire to a universal understanding of humanity in terms of its incomparable dignity and shared natural rights, and on the other hand adopt essentialist argument when it comes to women's nature, thus undermining the earlier understanding of humanity. It is understandable that inconsistency as such exist widely in our daily talking, and to some extent this is better to be attributed to the uncertainty and ambiguity of our existential condition as human being, rather than the inexactitude of argument or the imperfection of rationality. Yet the natural occurrence of such inconsistency does not in any sense make it innocuous or in some cases, unavoidable. Although it might be unrealistically pedant to aspire for an ultra-rational life pure from any ambiguity, it is equally unreasonable to treat all ambiguity as worthy of living with. As I will argue through the case analysis, the fallacy in one's reasoning over veiling can be spotted through deliberation governed by some norms of reason, which are not cultural-specific. Further, in the case of Tunisia, leaving the ambiguity as it is has increased unnecessary mental burden for those concerned and

brought disturbing confusion to their thoughts, which are both removable given further critical examination of one's reasoning. Before entering into details of my arguments, I will first give a preliminary review of existing discussion on veiling in Islam, so that my later critique for points from the debate can be read against a more comprehensive background.

2. Literature review: attack on veiling and the corresponding defense

After the preparative introduction on the debate inside Tunisia in this section I will examine how the debate on hijab has been carried out on a broader stage between its supporters and opponents. Although the phenomenon spotted in Tunisia only emerged recently, the debate on veiling has a much longer history, drawing attention and concern from scholars and communities worldwide on a continuous basis. To make a clear sketch of this admittedly lengthy story I shall examine the debate from the cons and pros respectively.

- **Attack on veiling**

Opposition against veiling has been found with different groups of people throughout history, both within the Islamic world and outside it. Here I will concentrate on one kind of criticism that is most pertinent to our current study.[23]The reasons given by the French government in its earlier proposal for *niqab* ban can serve as a good example for how the arguments of this kind of criticism generally go. France has ruled out Islamic headscarves in public places since 2004, and this year the government attempts to get a bill through, proposing a ban on full-length veil in public. To support the ban the French president Nicolas Sarkozy defined the *niqab* as 'the sign of subservience and debasement of women' which is 'not well-come in France', where secular human rights are cherished as bedrock for the country's tradition. The view has been further supported by Fadela Amara, the French minister in his calling the dress as a 'prison', and Jean-Francois Cope, another parliamentary leader by stating

[23] Another typical type of opposition against veiling can be found with some secular feminists, for whom veiling is an oppressive institution, which is incompatible with women's rights. Although similar to the Orientalist reading in terms of condemnation on covering, viewpoints expressed by these feminists are to be distinguished from the former in terms of its genuine commitment for well being of those concerned, as well as more comprehensive grasp of exiting cultural diversity within the Islamic community. For feminists who arguing from this stance, see Nawal El Saadiwi, *To Veil is a Political Symbol*, http://www.greenleft.org.au/2004/574/32877. On main problem with this kind of argument is its neglect for the spiritual needs that considered by many believers as one pivotal aspect of a good life. For a comprehensive critique for this point, see Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000):174-187. Besides, as I shall argue in the chapter four that to view the practice as a total institutional imposition is to overlook the ontological significance of the practice for those concerned. The argument for equality can not take for granted the existential reality of people in an Islamic community, for whom veiling constitutes an indispensible element of their everyday life.

that 'nobody, in places open to public or on streets, may wear an outfit or accessory whose effect is to hide the face'.[24]Similar remarks can also be found with other western leaders: for instance, back in 2001, the first lady of U.S. then Laura Bush justifies the war in Afghanistan by calling it the liberation of women from their imprisonment under the veiling. On other occasions, Tony Blair, the ex-prime minister of Britain equals the covering of Muslim women to a 'mark of separation making non-Muslims uncomfortable'. [25]

At first glance, these arguments seem to suggest an intrinsic incompatibility between veiling and modern life on the grounds of practical inconvenience the practice brings to modern communication and public security. 'Practical concerns' as such are sometimes justified by more sophisticated reference to the necessity of protecting the secular public order, which is defined as free from religious interference.[26] Nevertheless, a closer look at the issue reveals some problematic aspects of this line of reasoning. For instance, to call veiling as a sign of subservience and debasement of women is misleadingly suggesting a connection between the practice and unfair treatment of women. Yet in reality little evidence has been given substantially to prove that ill treatment of women, say, domestic violence is systematically associated with the wife's veiling. Further, nor it is justifiable to ban the practice for the reason of protecting public security, considering its implicit discrimination against a large number of peace-loving Muslims. The law's exclusive reference to Islamic veil unfairly implies that Muslims are more likely to become the source of threat to public security; whereas the security problem can be solved by making specific requirements of dress for certain circumstances without referring to the religious implication of the dress. For instance, if under some critical situations the covering is considered as potentially dangerous for facilitating the bomb-carrying on the public transportation, it might be reasonable for the institution concerned to propose a ban for all kinds of

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[24] "The war of French dressing: France's bar on Burqa", *The Economist* Jan 16, 2010,43-44.

[25] Alison Donnell, "Visibility, Violence and Voice? Attitudes to Veiling Post-11 Setember", in *Veil: Veiling, Representation and Contemporary Art*, ed. David A. Bailey and Gilane Tawadros(Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003):126. "Blair's Concern over Face Veils", http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/6058672.stm.

[26] One common defense on the French ban of the hijab refers to the country's cherished laïcité tradition. For a detailed account for the historical background of secularism in France, see Jocelyne Cesari, "Islam and French Secularism: The Roots of the Conflict," http://www.pbs.org/wnet/wideangle/episodes/young-muslim-and-french/islam-and-french-secularism-the-roots-of-the-conflict/2524/. Yet it is always contestable whether hardcore secularism as such is the best way to solve the assumed conflict between religion and secular state. For a sharp critique for the implicit 'secular fundamentalism' underlying the French government's handling with veil, please refer to Martha Nussbaum, *Liberty of Conscience: In Defense of America's Tradition of Religious Equality*(New York: Basic Books,2008): 346-353. According to Nussbaum, this rigid requirement made by the European countries for Muslim immigrants is violating the liberty of conscience of those involved and making assimilation a unilateral duty from the side of citizens.

dress at certain length. This does not have to be done through specifically referring to the Islamic veil.

In the wording of French president, the purity of French culture is defended by the leaders against alien elements introduced by the covering. Further, the secular social institution is defended against the intervention of religion. However, even metaphysically the Frenchness could be distinctively separated from the foreign influences, and the secular institution could be decisively differentiated from the religious establishment, how can such division work when it comes to real life cases? Does the protection of national purity necessitate the actual separation between people of different ethnicity and religion? By the same token, can secularism thus defined be fully carried out in reality when the fire in the mosque is expected to be put out by the government, and the religious establishments are sharing the same sewer system with other public facilities?

One meaningful question to be asked about the French officials' comment on the *niqab* is whether such kind of comments indicates a more implicit cultural prejudice against Islam. When it comes to this point we must look at the influence of works of Edward Said. Prejudice against Islam and Muslims within the western culture is a basic theme of Said's *Orientalism* and his many other critiques, and the colonial history and continuing imperialist reality have been identified as providing systematical support for prejudice as such. Surely it is one thing to point out that the narrative of literature plays an important role in constructing the collective identity, and therefore should be kept under constant critical check to make sure such an identity is inclusive enough for outsiders. After all, effective communication and mutual understanding wouldn't be possible if national identities were inflexibly defined to permanently exclude any alien and foreign element. For this point I am with Said in his good intention in asking for more tolerance for the Islamic world, so that an unbiased understanding of people of this part of the world and their religion can be achieved. Further, Said might be correct in suggesting that his proposed tolerance of the Islamic culture has been postponed historically due to the western colonization of the Muslim lands in the past several centuries; at least I am not in the position to judge that the numerous works and reports he cited are as he believes, implicitly biased against Islam. Yet what concerns me here is the possibility of rational discourse that is not circumstance-relative. If this possibility can be successfully argued, it helps to reduce effectively the chance of having any prejudice as colossal in scale as Said seems to have depicted.

The research methodology adopted by Said is of great influence to our current debate on veiling. On the one hand, *Orientalism* and the thriving of post-colonial study make hypersensitive any discussion regarding Islam and Muslim, and this is so especially with critical voices about the weakness of the Islamic world in terms of social democracy and basic human rights, of which the women's position remains a sub-issue. Surely it won't be acceptable if the Islam is attributed as source to all existing problems and cultural diversity within the Muslim community is denied in a demagogic report; yet it is equally unacceptable when tolerance of religion and foreign cultures becomes the categorical law that overrides the sensible understanding of the matter at issue. When it comes to veiling, it is more common for us to hear today about the discrimination against Muslim women's rights as expressed by the 'anti-veiling' incidents here and there, rather than actual details concerning these incidents. During an international conference in Tehran earlier this year, I was worried by a kind of misleading 'sympathy' that the western academics feel obligated to harbor toward Islam: when a British scholar sentimentally condemned the western ignorance of the cultural diversity of veiling through citing anti-veiling cases all over Europe, she received enthusiastic applause from the audience, western and Iranian alike. Under the contagious passion for 'diversified human community', only one Romanian human rights worker expressed disagreement with the far-reaching conclusion that this British scholars drew from disparate cases. According to this Romanian lady distinction should be made between the national ban of veiling and more subtle situations like exam, illegal driving and security check, where removing the face veil is necessary: whereas the national legislation of hijab ban within a democratic society, as the French case, is subject to dispute in terms of its appropriateness. It is entirely a different case to ask for individual identification under certain social situations, provided that the rule is not applied exclusively to Muslims. Yet it is more often that the prevailing passion for fighting against the Islam-phobia today allows little room for these subtle distinctions.

In the current case of Tunisia is considered, the notion that Islam is misrepresented and Muslims are unfairly treated is prevailing among the people I knew. The belief that the western world won't say anything fair about Islam has almost become self-evident for the students I have interviewed. For many, one usual reason for wearing the hijab is to represent the good side of Islam, or to defend the image of Islam which is believed to have been wronged by the West. Such strong sentiment seemed appealing at first glance, yet it becomes increasingly disconcerting to me during my completion of the thesis. The western prejudice and U.S. hegemony have been constantly mentioned by my Muslim friends in their charged comments on

Middle East politics, and to support their beliefs they often resort to sporadic incidents such as the Denmark Cartoon controversy, the murder of an Egyptian woman (who happened to be veiled) in Germany last year, and the recent ban of minarets in Switzerland. For them it is without doubt that all these are unanimously manifestations of a deep-seated bias against Islam. As we will see in later chapters, the reasoning process of such a line of thinking is likely to be flawed upon further reflection, and it is difficult for a person adopts such a view to justify oneself coherently.

Back to the question I raised in my reference to Said's *Orientalism*: is it possible for the rational discourse to achieve a fair degree of objectivity, independent of the general political background of the society from which it derives? My answer for this question is yes. After all, it makes no sense to argue against any prejudice or bias if one does not believe the possibility of objective reasoning in the first place, and one crucial feature of this reasoning is to distinguish facts and emotional distortion of the facts. It is a basic theme of *Orientalism* that the colonizer's ambition to dominate and rule results in their degrading the custom and under-evaluating the culture of the colonized. If we agree with the basic premise of this argument, namely, strong emotions can impair the soundness of judgment when kept out of control, then it follows that the eagerness to defend one's cherished idea/identity/custom or whatever can as well lead to distortion of facts, as illustrated by the case of Tunisia. In this paper I am using the term 'Orientalism' is used under a critical light, and it refers mainly to the misleading belief held by many of my informants, i.e., Islam and Muslims are wronged by an amorphous entity named the 'West', and now it is the critical time to defend Islam against such unfair treatment. Further, I am going to examine the impact of such a belief on individual reasoning over the veiling. A basic assumption regarding this point is: it is possible that the anger for the 'unjust West' correlates with one's unwillingness to evaluate the matter from the standpoint of the westerners when it comes to the debate on *hijab*? If so, what consequence will this unwillingness bring? These questions will be answered in my later exposition of universal reasoning and defense of it. Now we will first continue our literature review to look at another side of story from the defenders of the veil.

- **Defenses on veiling**

Historically, the defense on veiling has been developed in parallel with the attacks on practice. The focal point and general theoretical framework of scholars defending the

veiling vary from one case to another. Given my concern with Tunisia, here I shall only mention the most recent research in the time line, while leaving the discussion on some earlier works later when it is necessary. The following researches are different in terms of countries focused and research method adopted, yet they can be read in conjunction under their basic stance of talking back to the West, which is obviously expressed in their line of arguing.

In her "From Her Royal Body the Robe Was Removed: The Blessings of the Veil and the Trauma of Forced Unveiling in the Middle East", Mohja Kahf passionately shows how the massive return to hijab across the Arab societies turns out to empower women concerned.[27] According to Kahf, women are not merely satisfying their spiritual needs through picking up the veil, but also using it to escape the male guardianship at home, or to organize political protest against the government. Kahf celebrates the multiple practical functions served by veiling, defining it as posing a powerful challenge to the 'ubiquitous assumption' in the West. According to this assumption, Muslim women are made to veil by their husbands and the head covering of woman is a sign of subjugation. Besides, Kahf expresses sympathetic support for those who pick up the hijab out of their personal conviction, and condemns the enforced unveiling as carried out by the Shah in Iran, the government in Tunisia, and recently the leftist in Egypt as repressive, on the grounds of their violation of women's free will.

In another study carried out by Soroya Duval on the return of hijab among female Islamists in Egypt, the hijab has been praised as granting women the entrance ticket to the traditionally male-controlled public places such as streets and mosques.[28] Furthermore, she argues that veiling in Islam emphasizes on qualities such as thriftiness and moderation in needs, whereby differentiating Muslims from their western counterparts who are used to extravagant living and endless consumerism. Based on such distinction Duval proposes to understand veiling as voicing an Islamic feminism, for which concepts such as freedom and autonomy are rendered in different terms from those in Western parlance.

Echoing the previous paper in its defense of Muslim women's agency, Arlene Elowe Macleco has examined the return of hijab among working women from lower middle

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[27] Mohja Kahf, "From Her Royal Body the Robe Was Removed: The Blessings of the Veil and the Trauma of Forced Unveilings in the Middle East," in *The Veil: Women Writers on its History, Lore, and Politics*, ed. Jennifer Heath(California: University of California Press, 2008).

[28] Soroya Duyal, "New Veils and New Voices: Islamist Women's Groups in Egypt," in *Women and Islamization: Contemporary Dimensions of Discourses on Gender Relations*, ed. Karin Ask and Marit Tjomsland(New York; Berg, 1998).

class in Cairo back to the mid-1980s. [29]According to Macleco, these women, being driven into professional work in the public sphere during the economic boom in Egypt, picked up the veil to protest against the widely existing sexual harassment in their working places. However, unlike Duval who views the return to hijab as overall positive, Macleco has spotted another side of the story. Aside from the positive role veiling plays in protesting against harassment, it has also revealed the deep-rooted guilt vexing those concerned: these women saw themselves as having betrayed their traditionally assigned role inside the household as mothers and wives when working outside. Consequently, they took up the veil to reassure their lost femininity. Perplexed by this discovery, Duval terms the protest voiced by this self-initiated veiling movement as ambivalent and compromising.

Finally, in another recent research focusing on the wearing of hijab among Young Muslim immigrants in Canada, Homa Hoodfar argues that the self-led return to hijab among second generation Muslims brings them relative freedom from their family. [30]Besides, the phenomenon is also closely associated with the rampant discrimination these youngsters face in a major western society, where the veiling is taken by these women as the symbol of Islamic identity. In picking up the veil they are also protesting against the cultural chauvinism which they perceive to exist in their community.

The main points of the preceding researches can be rendered as follow: first of all, through delivering a more self-conscious and assertive profile of the veiled, these scholars aim at challenging the misrepresentation dominating the Western world as they believe it, in which veiling is treated as an intrinsic oppressive institution, the veiled women a silenced and passive lump. Second, all of them consider the veiling as liberating and empowering, this is based on women's conscious choosing of the attire as well as the manifold utilities the attire serves in practice. Third, the moral implications conveyed by the hijab such as 'modesty' has been defended in one way or another in terms of the uniqueness of Islam, and more vexing problems arising from these implications have been left unexamined(or in Macleco's case, rendered unsettled through her use of the term 'accommodating protest').

In the current paper, through investigating the self-accounts of young Tunisians on the

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[29] Arlene Elowe Macleco, "Hegemonic Relations and Gender Resistence: The New Veiling as Accommodating Protest in Cairo," in *Theorizing Feminism: Parallel Trends in the Humanities and Social Sciences*, ed. Anne C. Herrmann and Abigail J. Stewart(Oxford: Westview Press, 2001).

[30] Homa Hoodfar, "The Veil in Their Minds and on Our Heads: Veiling Practices and Muslim Women," in Women, *Gender and Religion: A Reader*, ed. Elizabeth A. Castell(New York: Palgrave, 2001).

matter of veiling, I am going to start with a problem left unaddressed in these preceding researches, namely, the impact of the moral implications of veiling and the individual reasoning on these implications. As I shall show through case analysis later, the feelings developed by the veiled toward the socially-expected behaviors attached to the veil are not unanimously positive, or at least they can not be simplified under words as pale as 'empowering' or 'liberating'. Rather, at times there is hesitation, confusion, or even fear when we read closely the individual's account of her choice of the veil. For instance, one of my informants is a devoted practitioner of Islam, who observes the religious teaching closely, and for this she is greatly admired by her friends. Yet in her self-account she is not happy all the time about taking such high ground in morality. Rather, she is constantly worried about how people will perceive her if she behaves otherwise. The great concern for breaking the social protocol relevant to veiling overweighs, and as a consequence she is burdened with self-censorship. Rendering her case in this way, my suggestion is not to disprove the point of earlier Muslim feminists mentioned by saying that veiling can be confining as well. The general evaluation of the actual benefits or downsides of the practice per se is not at stake here, neither do I consider very promising a consequence-based evaluation as such, given the fact that the social determination yields a particular consequence is not subject to the choice of individual. Not to mention that the consequences are not justified in their own terms. For instance, if one tries to say that veiling brings the consequence such as supporting the presence of women in public places, and this consequence cannot justify itself as desirable without referring to further justification like the importance of having gender equality in society or whatever. In this way an infinite regress of justification is triggered by this line of thinking. On the other side, unlike the communitarian argument claims, I do not think that the cultural or social conditions that an action like veiling is subject to is infinitely complex to make any sense of human agency impossible. Rather, to act upon some sense of autonomy should be assumed as possible on the social and personal level alike, so that it makes sense to discuss questions concerning fair treatment or free choices. For the former, the positive social changes are proved as possible by the admirable achievements of the feminist movement in the last century in different countries has already demonstrated. In the case of Tunisia, women's conditions are admittedly improved through years of legislative endeavor, and Tunisian women today do not have to suffer from unilateral divorce initiated by the husbands or the deprivation of heritage rights, which still bother some of their Arab sisters. To see this we do not have to agree on deeper concerns of the government to promote such a legal change, be it wooing the western onlookers or strengthening the autocratic regime inside the country, still less do we have to justify the Tunisian

political structure, which is still far from democratic in terms of other basic human rights such as freedom of speech and voting rights. In any case it is not my intention to downplay the humanistic ideal expressed by earlier Muslim feminists in their works through their insistence on the importance of self-determination, as well as the possibility of justice. What I am concerned here is about the definition of choice that perplexes the earlier discussions. Further, how we should consider the question of choice, so that the liberation on the individual level can be genuinely achieved rather than optimistically assumed by the researchers. As the earlier discussion suggest, the choice of veiling should be considered as free so long as women are not forced into the practice by external forces, presumably the husbands and the national law, and being able to develop some thoughts on the practice while using them in defending one's choice. The absence of external cohesion and right of self-determination are surely essential for our conception of choice; there won't be any choice at all if one is made into a practice against his/her personal will, even if the imposed behavior is beneficial to the individual. Insofar as veiling is concerned I agree that at the social institutional the government should better leave the issue to be decided by people themselves. The reason for my belief is mainly the respect for individual's liberty of conscience, which might be violated if the government promulgates any specific law favoring or disfavoring such behavior. For this point I am with the argument of some Muslim feminists that governmental banning the headscarf (not the face-veil or niqab which I consider as a different case) through constitution is repressive insofar as its disrespect for self-determination in religious practice is considered, provided that the practice does not violate more basic rights of others. Yet when it comes to individual lives my observation is that the absence of external cohesion is far from sufficient in defining the consequence of veiling as liberating, as all previous Muslim feminists have believed. The voluntariness of making the choice in the first place does not automatically put at bay the ambiguity, uncertainty and confusion that a person might feel afterwards. In all earlier discussion, no separate attention has been given to the free choice and its connotation in terms of individual cases, and the discourses of the veiled have instead been summed up through its grand political implications, be it protesting against sexual harassment or entering the public space. The deeper philosophical implications of this kind of reading of veiling will be left to my analysis in the final section of the paper. Here what is at issue is whether the uncertainty and confusion existing in individual reasoning on a controversial matter as veiling can be subsumed under the definition of free choice as free from external cohesion, as implicitly suggested by the previous research. If not, what should we add to qualify a choice as liberating for the person concerned?

This leads to the problem of practical reason and its position in defining a free choice. My discussion of practical reason does not concern the legislative issue in the public sphere, although practical reason plays a crucial role in constituting actual laws for all citizens. In this paper I shall focus on the individual use of practical reason to sort out the underlying contradiction of accepted beliefs and more sensible maxims of action. The external condition such as a felicitous political environment is not sufficient to define an action as a free choice, given the fact that individuals are likely to be inconsistent in beliefs and incoherent in actions without the effective application of practical reason to examine one's thoughts and actions. To be sure, this situation is pretty natural and obvious in our everyday life, and for most of the time the source of confusion or incoherence does not have to be something as controversial as the veiling. For instance, although attending college is definitely up to individual choice, and generally considered as good, when it comes to individual cases. one might reasonably be confused over the purpose of higher education: is it worthwhile to engage in years of book-learning, which might be of little practical use? Students are often torn between the intellectual needs and practical concerns. And in other cases conceptual confusions are almost unavoidable, especially in matters of great personal significance. For instance, we can be confused over the actual worthiness of attending a test-preparation class for an important exam if the final results fail to leave up to the expectation, or feel uncertain about how to make an overall judgment of a close friend who turns out to be dishonest occasionally. In both cases the initial will in making the choice, namely, take the class and befriend a person, can not predict the further development afterwards, yet such results have decisive influence over our understanding of the chosen entity, and confusion will arise if the development contains contradictory information to our earlier belief or assumption. Therefore when it comes to a heated issue as veiling, it is understandable that one is easily lost in different contending points around it, feeling conceptually confused over the original choice. Yet the naturalness of the occurrence does not at all make the confusions innocuous, or even unavoidable. For instance, if I adopt the argument that to veil is to protect the female body which is more fragile by nature, then it is very likely that I will find it is justified for a society to assign different jobs for men and women according to their different natural strength. If at the same time I am a supporter for equal opportunity for both genders in the employment policy, then I will be at contradiction with myself over the definition of female fragility and its relation with employment fairness. Take another example: if I adopt the argument that to veil is to combat consumerism, which is ideologically western in nature, then it is likely that I will be confused when noticing that it can be a pursuit of fashion as well with some people, and some Muslim countries today are developing capitalism with no less zeal

than its western counterparts. In both cases, a critical reflection on the assumptions I adopted might reveal the problematic nature of points such as 'women are weak by nature', or 'veiling is the effective way against consumerism', and my earlier confusion in practice will be cleared, or at least partly solved. Therefore I am arguing here for the practical reasoning, defined broadly as the capacity to examine one's held belief over a choice critically, should be considered as a necessary condition for any choice to be defined as free.

When it comes to practical reason more conceptual clarification is needed before we move to the next point. In general what I mean by reason refers to a basic fact that can be identified in all human beings, namely, we are capable of having self-awareness of out thoughts and actions. In this paper my basic premise is that the capacity of reason is available in all in virtue of one's being human, and it is a transcendental fact non-relative to the concrete cultural or social backgrounds dividing one another further apart. (Further argument for this point cannot be pursued given the main subject of this paper on an empirical case and its implication rather than pure philosophical discussion.) Moreover, the term 'practical' refers to a Kantian distinction of reason in terms of its use in different spheres. Broadly speaking according to Kant, theoretical reason regulates our inquiry of nature in general and is limited by the natural determinations as proved by our possible experiences in its use. In contrast the practical reason presumes free will of our actions and can be put into constitutive use in legislating moral laws for all humans, insofar as one bears the tile of human.[31]Our discussion on veiling and its implication for the matter of choice in general concern practical reason rather than theoretical reason in the sense that it is not the empirical opinions/views that people have on this matter per se at issue here. Nor it is my interest to conduct a pure sociological analysis on, say, the over-determination of veiling, or an anthropological report on the nuanced meanings that the practice bears under a particular cultural context. The question that I am concerned with is more general than that: first, the universality of reason in all humans granted (a point I take as the starting point without further vindication), what are the most important factors we have to consider when defining an action as free? Second, is there a way to adequately understand the nature of cultural practices in general, where the cultural meanings are not treated as a bunch of isolable and free-standing properties pertaining to an entity named 'culture'? I am going to talk about this a little more in the following section.

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[31] See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar(Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1996), A647/B675; A802/B830; "Critique of Practical Reason," in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor(New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 5:16.

3. Main questions and chapter outline

- **Main Questions**

To further spell out my main points sketched above, it will be helpful for me to explicate them through two stories from my field trip. Despite their triviality, these experiences turned out to help my constructing of main questions for the current thesis.

The first story happened with a Tunisian taxi driver during my stay at the country. As part of the research routine I asked about the meaning of 'hijab' and its implications every time I got on a taxi. Like all other friendly taxi drivers, Ahmed was willing to educate me on the subject through patiently explaining to me that the modest dress in Islam is required of men and women alike. Meanwhile he bitterly complained how life had been demanding for him recently after his wife's sudden quitting of job and becoming 'muttadayiinah'(the Tunisian way of calling the veiled). Knowing that I was going to write on the return of hijab in my master thesis, before my jumping off the taxi, he almost begged me: "please say something good about Islam in your writing and leave the negative side with you". Impressed by the sincerity of his tone, I responded with a reassuring 'certainly, no problem' with my head nodding understandingly.

The second case is with Zanouba, a vivacious veiled student pursuing her bachelor degree in Mathematics. Getting a little bit confused by my constant asking for the meaning of hijab in Tunisia today, she emphasized with a smile: "like I told you, it does not symbolize anything, and it is merely a religious obligation like the five-time daily prayer, fasting and pilgrimage." Her point has been further supported by Saida, who start wearing hijab from her adolescence. Being an experienced high-school teacher in human rights, Saida sees the current return of hijab in Tunisia as a positive phenomenon. Like Zanouba, she showed the same incomprehension with my research interest focusing on the piece of cloth on her head. She constantly attempted to re-contextualize the veiling within Islam, which for her resembles a holistic way of living that defies any isolated reading or fragmentary explanation. As she puts it: "hijab is only a small part of being a devoted Muslim. This is to say that no distinction should be made between faith and life, and when it comes to faith it has be practiced rather than kept to oneself (namely, to veil is an essential part of being faithful)."

Despite the triviality of these stories, they are closely connected with two main theoretical questions I am going to address in the paper: first, how can the return of

hijab and people's reasoning on this issue be read under the light of the critical political situation of the region, and second, when it comes to the question of choice, what theoretical implications can be offered by an investigation into the ontological significance of veiling.

For the first question, what concerns me is a popular feeling that Islam and Muslim have been treated unfairly by the world, mainly the West. For an average Tunisian such a belief is strengthened on the daily basis through the news reports on new miseries in Gaza and Iraq, and for the intellectuals more systematic documentary on the western crime toward Islam can be found with works from prominent dissidents like Said and Chomsky. My point here is not that humanistic disaster did not actually happen in places like Gaza and Iraq. No matter how sensational reports of Aljazeera appear, my basic common sense and conscience do not allow me to pretend that the photos of wounded Palestinian children and self-accounts of the unemployed youth in Gaza are mere forgery of the media. For this much I find the quest of Said and Chomsky admirable in terms of their touching sensitivity to human suffering and willingness to empathize with cultures different from theirs. However, it is one thing to accept basic realities as they are in each case, and another to believe that all these cases indicating the general stereotype against Islam and Muslim exist widely in the western society. Therefore, it is one thing to notice that one Egyptian woman was killed in Germany last year by her employer, and one of the many motivations causing the murder could be the personal stereotype against Islam; it is however entirely another thing to conclude that the incident indicates the rise of Islam-phobia inside Germany, or even Europe in general. Since the later kind of assumption includes a large group of people (all Germans, Europeans or Westerners), and selectively overlooks other alternative explanations for one event which are not religious-specific, it could be invalid in terms of its reasoning process. Yet what disconcerts me is the pervasiveness of this kind of over-generalization in the popular opinion on issues concerning Islam, and no complex background information is needed for convincing a general Tunisian student I knew into believing that the international environment is hostile for the Muslim population as a whole. If the sophisticated arguments developed by Said in *Orientalism* can be summed up as the decisive influence of politics over cultural matters, namely, the continuing warfare between the ex-colonial countries and the Islamic world results in systematic prejudice in the West against Islam, then this point can be considered as well understood among the average Tunisian regardless of the educational level. Too often people lament the Palestinians and condemn the U.S. and Israel for the war crimes in Iraq, there is too little talk about the political corruption inside Palestine, let alone the brutal crimes committed

by the Saddam regime. One might be furious about the denial of a veiled teacher in France entering school, yet feels indifferent to the recent trial of a Tunisian professor for transmitting a message on facebook. Double standards abound when it comes to the questions of rights, and the deep-seated conviction of a wronged Islam holds sway in a majority of comments I came across. Therefore, when it comes to the case of veiling, my first question is about how does this tendency of response emotionally to what happened influence the individual reasoning over the veiling debate. Will strong belief in an unfair relation between the West and Islam bring specific difficulty to thinking about arguments overloaded with ideological trap? This question will be further examined in Chapter three, in which we will see how my interviewees found difficulty in spotting weak points in popular preaching for veiling on TV and internet.

For the abovementioned stance not to be misunderstood it is better for me to recount my personal experience and its impact on my conceiving of the current research. Personally I share a strong emotional bond with my Tunisian friends because of my studying of Arabic, which facilitates my acquaintance with the Arab side of story when it comes to heated debates in the Middle East in general. Yet I am convinced that personal feelings have little to do with a fair judgment of one issue, which depends more on disinterested reasoning. It is based on this principle I am arguing against the cultural-relativist assumption held by some Muslim feminists, with the hope to defend the practical reasoning capacity, which seems to me universal for all human beings. Although terms like 'reason' and 'universal value' are rendered more often in Western parlance, the central idea expressed by them as the fair treatment for all human fellows in moral legislation is by no means exclusively western. The same quest for justice is expressed in different languages in non-western cultures as well, including the Confucian teaching I am familiar with, and the Islamic culture I am drawn into.[32] On the other hand, the cultural chauvinism and provincialism are by no means exclusive to the western parlance. During my field trip it is not uncommon for me to encounter compulsive preaching here and there, sometimes even regardless of my refusal, and for some of my Arab friends my cherished belief in Confucianism was jeered as an atheistic doctrine. Insofar as disrespect for other people's liberty of conscience is concerned I see no difference between these cases and prejudices suffered by some Muslims in the western world. Precisely because as human beings we are all naturally inclined to favor the familiar over the alien, it is important to search for common ground through reasoning when cross-cultural comparison is made.

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[32] For arguments for rational discourse and critique of reason in Islam, please refer to Mohammed Akroun. *The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought*(London : Saqi in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2002); *Islam: To Reform or to Subvert*(London: Saqi Essentials, 2006).

For the second question, what I am pointing at is epistemological assumption behind a researcher's asking for the meaning of veiling. Interpretation of the meaning of veiling is an essential part for any research on this practice, and epistemological stance held by the researcher has a decisive influence on how the practice is represented in the research work. As we have seen in the preceding discussion, the question of choice and its implications for the veiling are central to the existing debate over the practice. One basic theoretical assumption of the discussion on choice is arguably of the subject-object kind, namely, viewing human beings as agents capable of knowing good from bad and acting based on judgment made out of such knowledge accordingly. The free will in terms of making independent moral judgment is presumed so that it is sensible to talk about choice, and in my concern for the current case, the practical reasoning over one's choice. Yet a crucial question remains to be whether it is the most appropriate way of viewing what is going on with the veiled through the emphasis on subject-object kind of choice alone. Surely holding on to the discourse of choice and reasoning has their position insofar as the institutional justice regarding religious practice is concerned, yet such rather broad consideration is not at stake when it comes to the concrete existential condition of those living around this practice. To illustrate my point here I shall list some small accidents from my stay in Tunisia. Throughout my field trip, when being asked about the meaning of the attire, people frequently responded by saying 'why ask, this is religion.' (In one case, I was even challenged by a young male driver for 'flying across half a planet to study something as trivial as the hijab). For some, even to think about the topic raised great difficulty, and the reference to God instantly comes to occupy the answer. Nearly in every case, a more sophisticated answer only came much later, usually after much thinking and accompanied with contrivance. These details might be considered as irrelevant if our general task is to inquire into the question of choice and people's actual reasoning over it, for they are merely the empirical data lack information through which we obtain opinions. They might even be taken as the natural process of ice breaking, which is common for all interview-dependent research. According to this belief these people were simply unwilling to give crucial information to a stranger at the first encounter. Yet what catches my attention here is not how trivial the veiling is to these people, but rather how existentially invisible the practice is for those concerned; not how cliché the reference to God sounds but rather how frequent people are unaware of doing so. For the Tunisians I knew veiling or not was not a question in the first place. This is not to say that the practice can not be further thought as a thematised question by my informants, for sure they can otherwise they would not take up the interview. What I am saying here is that veiling does not invite any special

notice from the Tunisians, and this has nothing to do with whether one has research interest or not over the matter. Following Heidegger in his work on the ontological analysis, I will briefly attribute such 'not feeling strange' over veiling to the overwhelming familiarity average Tunisian has toward the attire as part of his/her Being-in-the-world. My main question regarding this point is whether we can be conceived as free-floating subject capable of independent moral reasoning when it comes to choice, if not, what implications can familiarity have over the choice and our reasoning of it. Back to the cases mentioned earlier, what does it mean to be inquisitively attracted by veiling, which has nothing to do with personal research interest? Further, how should we understand the familiarity which is not the quantitative description of experience we have, but the indispensible structure of our being human? These are questions which can not be answered easily without a preliminary background introduction to Heidegger's vision of our Being-in-the-world as Daseins. As the most difficult task to tackle I will leave this exposition in the last part of the thesis.

Chapter Two: Liberating or Burdensome? Case Study of the Veiled

"The wearing of hijab is new in Tunisia, and most importantly, the way of wearing it now is pure modern." [33]Nadia, the 27-year-old was pursuing her master degree in marketing in a prominent local university, and as she considers it, the scarf on her head is an attempt to reconcile between the modern way of living and dictates of Islam: "*Hijab* in Islam has prescribed some general guidelines for the way women dress themselves, most importantly, not in something transparent, tight and showy. I am always trying to keep myself within boundaries set up by these principles without loing the basic awareness of beauty. While covering by *hijab* is obligatory, the full-length covering by *niqab* is not required by Islam." For Nadia, although the religion prefers more stringent regulation in this regard, she always finds it justifiable to loosen the rigidness of such regulation to make room for personal expression: "I am ok with wearing colorful *hijab* and sometimes I take light-scented perfume, so that I look great and appear modest at the same time." According to her, what underlies her emphasis on the awareness of beauty is the fact that for her generation, the veil, its intricate religious implications aside, is a new phenomenon which has to find its place in the modern way of living. "Just like the requirement for 'modesty', being incontestably a social convention, should be found as varying through time and understood differently under disparate cultures, the wearing of *hijab* today necessarily carries a new message, namely, the personal expression of one's spirituality can go hand in hand with a modern way of life where the person is guaranteed the full right of public participation", Nadia explained to me with a proud smile on her face, feeling grateful for the liberty that young people like her can enjoy in a hybrid culture like Tunisia. In our conversation, she constantly referred to the a-political implication of *hijab* on Tunisian street today through equating it with other individualized outfit such as T-shirt and jeans, and for Nadia, who was the first one in her family to adopt the veil, this choice does not hinder her at all from becoming the kind of person she is aspires to become, namely, the global citizen with open-mindedness toward the world and cutting competence in the professional field. When being asked about the possible inconvenience the *hijab* might bring to her in job-hunting (given that some companies in the country are holding reservation toward the dress), she passionately defended her cherished personal choice by pleading a fair judgment from such companies. According to her, the standard of selection should be based on the professional competence of the individual rather than the dress s/he chooses to wear.

To begin our investigation with Nadia's case is revealing, for she does not only serve

[33] Interview taken in Jul 2009 at Tunis, Tunisia.

an excellent example for the new generation of young Tunisian who find themselves inevitably overwhelmed by what Nadia terms as 'globalization', in terms of which traditions as the veiling should be redefined, but also a telling illustration for how wearing of *hijab* in Tunisia is entangled with central questions concerning the practice of religion and personal choice. In expressing her reservations toward full covering and support for hijab as the new fashion of the young, Nadia seemed eager to exculpate the veiled from the imposed negative stigma and substitute it with a new profile that is open-minded, competent and intellectual. To her the practice of one's religion with civic order within a modern community should be free, and wearing the hijab should also be left for personal decision. This is also the crucial assumption for the hijab-fashion analogy Nadia developed in her defense for hijab, namely, similar to the case of fashion which can be tolerated for being idiosyncratic, to practice one's religion through wearing hijab should also be granted as individual choice. For Nadia, to adopt a modern way of living comes before the personal practice of religion, and it is based on this reason she rejects niqab due to its incurred inconvenience in identifying the identity of the wearer, thus hindering the effective communication between individuals. Since hijab is perfectly fitting for all kinds of activities an individual is likely to undertake today, she sees no reason to deprive women the rights of wearing it.

Taking the veiling as a personal choice of fashion is common ground shared by other students such as Zounuba, for whom being beautiful is an undeniable right for whoever chooses the dress.[34]In explaining to me the reason that she never wears jilbab(a full-length robe wrapping the whole body loosely, usually single colored and worn with the headscarf), she mentioned: "God loves beauty and that's the reason he created different colors. Although putting on the hijab is to prevent *fitna*, it should not make you look miserable or hideous. On the contrary, we should take advantage of different colors to look good on our part, while still living up to the modest requirement." Like Nadia, Zounuba was also the first one in her family to put up the veil, after a painstaking effort to convince other family members who were either worried about the stringent governmental ban on the attire or scared by its rampant misuse by religious demagogues in subversive activities. Now in her twenties, Zounuba still recalls how stressful the situation had been for the veiled when she first started it seven years ago, back to when the trend had much fewer followers than now and could lead to expulsion from school as punishment. Yet, lucky for Zounuba, who is the daughter of a teaching staff in the school, the draconian punishment was never exercised. To her pride, she even succeeded in challenging the prevailing stereotype

[34] Interview taken in Aug 2009 at Tunis, Tunisia.

against the veiled by getting first honors in her class and receiving the prize with the hijab. "For me back to that time, the forbidden is desirable, and more the government controls the veil, the more I find it tempting to challenge the rule." Again, the case of Zounuba seems to suggest that veiling is not only compatible with living a modern life to the full, but is conducive to innovative interpretation of the religious implications of the attire, in the case of which the rigid standard set up by the male clergy is constantly loosened to make room for personal expression. Besides, it can be further inferred that strict control on the attire does not always work to keep its adamant followers at bay, and in some cases the control can turn out to be counterproductive and generates rebellion from the young.

Like Nadia and Zounuba, Salwa, the undergraduate student in her final year, also finds herself in agreement with the point that the main characteristic of the current hijab trend is its idiosyncrasy, which partly motivates the imitation between peers due to the young's fondness of fashion.[35] According to her, the veiling used to be infrequent in the country, but now it seems to spread rapidly among young college students like her. Unlike Nadia and Zounuba, who searched online for religious implications of veiling before picking up the practice, Salwa started veiling for more expedient reasons. As a student from southern Tunisia, living and studying in the capital constantly made Salwa feel homesick and insecure. "Back home I used to dress like you, and only recently I have decided to become more respectable (meaning to veil)", Salwa explained while referring to my casual wear of T-shirt and jeans. "When you find yourself alone in a city far away from home, knowing that no one is anywhere near for help when you are in trouble, the only one you can resort to is God. He knows what is going on with me and listens to my prayers, and I want to be closer to him through this", she recounted, pointing to the tightly wrapped scarf on her head. Besides, for Salwa there is another background story for to her changing outfit, namely, the need to show sympathy for the injured image of Islam and solidarity with wronged Muslims around the globe. Like many of the students I have encountered, Salwa holds sharp criticism of the unfair treatment suffered by Muslims after 9/11. "Israel and U.S. are the ones who started the war by occupying the land of Palestine and killing innocent civilians from Iraq to Kabul, and how dare they call us 'terrorists' when the news from Gaza shows that people are deprived of nearly all the essentials of life," Salwa reasoned with indignation, condemning the U.S. as the leading infringer of human rights and democracy. However, personally Salwa does not want to stay veiled out of practical concern and is willing to give it up if any real trouble occurs. For her the strict control imposed by the Tunisian government on this matter is

[35] Interview taken in Aug 2009 at Tunis, Tunisia.

unpleasant but justifiable: "the government is reasoning like the French, i.e., religion should be confined to the private sphere in order for people to be judged equally in public regardless of their personal religion, and I will comply if one day I am told to take off the scarf in public places." Unlike Nadia and Zounuba who emphasize the right to practice one's religion openly, Salwa finds her increasing religiosity, to some extent, ramshackle in the face of her deeper convictions in the secular nature of the public sphere.

Despite the nuanced difference in personal stories, the above three cases can be read in conjuction to provide us some general characteristics of the hijab trend in Tunisia, as well as valuable clues for problems arising with it. Back in the first chapter I have made brief arguments against the veiling, mainly on the grounds of the institutional oppression the dress imposes on women and its political allusion to religious extremism. The secular feminism opposes veiling usually for the former reason, and some European leaders are more concerned with the latter in proposing the ban of veil. Regarding these considerations, the examples of Nadia, Zounuba and Salwa can povide implications as follow: first of all, these cases indicate that it is hasty to conclude the practice as overall oppressive, be it in the physical or ideological sense. There are no reports that these cheerful students were subject to physical abuse from their family members, nor was it the case that they had given up basic principles concerning gender equality once the hijab was picked up. On the contrary, to both Nadia and Salwa personal rights can override the need of religious expression under certain circumstances. Therefore it should not be assumed that the practice of veiling is bonded with a higher rate of domestic violence, or will necessarily result in weakening one's demand for equal opportunities. Furthermore, if the oppression assumption were right in its judgment of the practice, namely, the religion prescribes strict law of covering for women shows systematic bias against women, then it would be reasonable to either ditch the religion that prescribed the practice altogether, or to put strict control on its influence in the public sphere, so that the established secular rights for women would be preserved. Both the French and Tunisian government might defend their ban of veil by this line of reasoning. However, for students such as Nadia and Zounuba who believe in the religious necessity of veiling, religion is neither a dispensable option that one can do without, nor a private matter that is preferably to be taken up at home only. Rather, trying hard to prove the possibility of reconciliation between being a citizen endowed with full rights and a believer obliged by religious obligation, both Nadia and Zounuba value the spirituality suggested by hijab as an inalienable aspect of their life and ask for the right to realize such spirituality in public. Further, in their defense of the attire by words and action, the

veiling does not only seem to be non-oppressive and non-confining, but liberating and increasing their control over life, through inspiring the argument for religious freedom, expressing protest for governmental ban, and offering solace for the loneliness of studying away from home. Without doubt these utilities provided by the veiling benefit the practitioners in each case, at least as the individuals concerned seem to have suggested. Back to the literature review in the previous chapter, this kind of practical benefits brought by the veil has been constantly used as evidence for the liberating nature of the attire, and this point does have an intuitive appeal if we are preoccupied with the aim to correct a prevailing prejudice against the veiled. Yet to define the nature of veiling based on the actual function served by the attire falls short in being consequentialist in the judgment; thus it is easily to be opposed based on other cases in which veiling brings inconvenience to those concerned. More importantly, to hastily label the practice as liberating will hide the complexity of what happened to these women, as I will show as follow.

Riyad is a young researcher fellow at a U.S. funded research center in the capital, whom I interviewed during my stay in the center as a visiting scholar.[36] To him, the veiling in general is influenced by the political relation between the West and the Islamic world, and when it comes to the case of Tunisia the people seem to care more about the fashionable look of the dress rather than its broad political implications. Being a secular scholar, Riyad disagrees with the popular idea that veiling can prevent the female *fitna*, and for him to define the female body as sexually appealing seems incompatible with the modern view of gender. Further, witnessing dissembling behaviors of the veiled around him, Riyad expressed serious doubt over the connection between one's moral integrity and the choice of veiling, as he put it: "For some to veil is simply to fake the appearance of being pious so that one can be married off more easily, and the Tunisian men today have been warned of the great danger of finding the ugly truth for their veiled wives-to-be. In my experience some girls from my neighborhood had lived a casual and libertine life until the age of marriage. They used to go to night clubs and hang around with guys casually, but once with the scarf on they can now pretend to be religious for those who don't know them. As for me these girls are untrustworthy no matter how well they pretend to behave right now." This bitter observation echoes comments of Mohammad, a university professor teaching economics in the country's best business school, as he puts it: "The hijab is a sign, a signal. Women are sending a symbolic message to people around them that they are not the messing around type, which might help to attract the

[36] Interview taken in Jul 2009 at Tunis, Tunisia.

attention of a potential husband. But it is also well known that most women are faking by doing so." Amel, one colleague of Mohammad, surely knows what is really going on with some of her veiled students who appear to be morally impeachable, for she has witnessed frequently her veiled students flirting with their boyfriends in public, as well as cheating in exams. According to her these are acceptable for a veiled woman.

The above remarks seem to suggest that the veiling can not be examined from perspective the veiled alone, for there are social expectations attached to the attire regulating what is morally desirable for the veiled, and what is not. These expectations can not be overlooked for they have a clear bearing on how the veiled reason over their choice, as the following cases will show.

Salsabi is a student majoring in Chinese who started veiling not long before our first encounter. [37] She at first felt blessed by the choice of veiling for the practice is considered as symbolizing the spiritual transformation of a person inside an Islamic culture, as she reports it: "It feels so great when people around bless me for my conversion and wish they could be like me. I never feel closer to God than now, as if he were omnipresent in my life as a whole!" Salsabi cherished this unique experience so much that she swears repeatedly throughout the interview that she is never going to take off the scarf whatsoever. Yet the joy on her face fades away when recalling the reason leading to her conversion: "I was not a religious person and led a common life as other non-observing Tunisians. Yet recently I start to watch the religion channels on TV, which talk abundantly about the severe consequence of ignoring the calling of God. According to these programs the unveiled are unable to get to heaven and will be tormented in hell after death, and this scares me. Since we never know when we are going to die, we had better start to prepare for it now." As she siad earlier, it is a popular belief that veiling marks the making of a spiritual contract with God, and consequently to take off the veil afterwards will incur negative comments from people. "I do not want to be doubted for my sincerity", Salsabi said at the end of our conversation, worrying about the public censor she might suffer when being spotted as lapsing in her changed dress code.

In another case, Sausa, a master student in abnormal psychology is also haunted by the dreadful warning given by Imams on TV for the unveiled. [38] Like Salsabi, Sausa sticks to veiling all the time when she is outside, and according to one of her teacher her persistence on veiling has once cost her the opportunity of passing an exam, when

[37] Interview taken in Jul 2009 at Tunis, Tunisia.

[38] Interview taken in Jul 2009 at Tunis, Tunisia.

the invigilator required her to take the hijab off. Since Sausa started veiling during one congregational prayer in her school, her 'conversion' is thus witnessed by the presence of her classmates. It worries her how the casual taking of the veil will endanger her reputation among her friends on campus. She reveals to me once that being called as a hypocrite will severely damage one's personal life in a society like Tunisia, where the honor of an individual is highly valued. Therefore she sees the definite necessity of keeping self-discipline so that no breach of faith will occur. On the other hand, exercising self-censorship is by no means an easy task for Sausa. Rather, for most of the time, to observe all the social protocols attached to veiling amounts to a grueling drudgery. Being familiar with the theory of Freud as a psychology student Sausa holds an interesting theory for what is actually going on with the veiled: "Although to veil means to represent the best side of Islam and one should never complain about that, it is also true that one will sacrifice a lot from picking up the short clothes in summer to wearing the make-up in public. Further, no pre-marital sex is allowed for the veiled. These all result in repressing of one's natural desires, and according to Freud the mental repression has to be constantly released so that it won't lead to psychological problems." After that Sausa shows me pictures of her dressed in T-shirt and wearing make-up at home, referring to it as her personal way of minimizing the repression caused by the rigid self-discipline.

If the accounts of Sausa showed that living up to the social expectations for the veiled brings mental stress, then such stress is not found to be tolerable in every case. For Leila, Sausa's classmate, it is unbearable to fulfill all the rigid code of behavior for the veiled, which led to her quitting of hijab two years ago.[39] At first she was talked into veiling by one of her friends during a stressful period of her college life, as she recalled it: "I felt anxious about what was going on with my study, and I was told that putting up the hijab will help miraculously, so I tried." However, veiling did not work magic for Sausa's study problems, as her friends had promised. On the contrary, what awaited her was increasing formalism in one's way of dress that appears to her as time-consuming, as she puts it: "The idea behind the modest dress is to make things easier. Yet ironically I find myself using more time to dress myself properly everyday and paying extra attention to how people feel about me. That is one weird part of actually picking up the hijab. " Further, to her surprise her intimate personal relationships were also damaged due to her veiling, for people were described as treating her differently since her picking up the *hijab*. In her words, "My friends used to tell me everything before, yet they no longer do so after my veiling. It is commonly

[39] Interview taken in Aug 2009 at Tunis, Tunisia.

believed that the veiled are conventional and judgmental, and people would censor their thoughts before talking to me." As a professional psychiatrist-to-be, Sausa finds such reservation held by people around her disturbing especially when it comes to her relations with clients during the internship. Patients are supposed to feel comfortable in telling her everything, yet her putting on the hijab makes such un-reserved conversation difficult, for most patients would choose not to talk about intimate issues of sex and violence. The actual difficulty the dress brought to Leila's personal and professional life soon disenchanted her from the popular myth around veiling. Although this happened two years ago, Leila could not help shedding tears when recalling her unhappy past with the veiling, feeling sad about some friends she lost after entering the practice and getting out of it.

The above cases reveal a more complex side of veiling, which can not be understood separately from the beliefs one accepts when picking up the practice, as well as the social expectations one is supposed to fulfill. In the case of Salsabi, her decision to veil is influenced by the Imam's talking on the Final Judgment, and for Sausa and Leila whether to stick to veiling or not wouldn't make any sense if there were no public pressure on what is expected to be observed by the veiled in the first place. When it comes to the individual experience with veiling, the choice does not end with one's initial volition, nor will one's initial understanding of the practice prevent further confusion rising in the later development. Rather, the choice of veiling has revealed an on-going process of reasoning over what is the most proper thing to do, and the religious and practical considerations are balanced against each other all the way along. Therefore if our aim is to define the free choice in regard of veiling, then the choice should first be considered as a continuing process requiring the intellectual engagement of an individual, rather than a static point in time emitting permanent impact on later occurrences. This is one problem I see with some of the earlier researches on veiling, where the practice is defended as liberating insofar as women make the initial decision out of personal will, and being able to benefit from the utilities brought by the practice. Yet as suggested by cases with these Tunisian students, the initial decision, arguably independent, can neither dispense with existing beliefs of veiling in one's community, nor in any sense guarantee the utilities of the dress as profitable. In the case of Salsabi, one could pick up the *hijab* voluntarily yet felt coerced into veiling out of fear for hell; in the case of Leila one could be burdened by veiling given certain social stereotype against the veiled and the nature of one's chosen profession. This does not only point out the insufficiency of defining the matter of choice solely from an utilitarian stance, namely, considering only the actual benefits the practice brings, but also the inadequacy of evaluating the practice without

taking into account the personal reasoning over the matter.

Brandly speaking, these veiled students can be said as, explicitly or implicitly, participating in different political activities, be it promoting a positive image of Islam or protesting the governmental banning. My point here is not to deny such broad meanings of veiling, as pointed out by earlier Muslim feminists. (Again, the more basic theoretical assumption of such a reading of veiling is to be discussed in the final chapter.) Yet what concerns me is that to emphasize these general implications of veiling can't explain all the detailed choices one faces on a daily basis, from the legitimacy of exhibiting a religious icon openly to the appropriateness of wearing the colorful outfit when veiling, from the propriety of wearing make up to the compatibility between veiling and some particular occupations. Compared with the general meaning of veiling, these are detailed yet pressing issues requiring the subtlety in judgment and flexibility in dealing. On a more basic level, choosing veil means to face up to small decisions as such, which at times, requires more subtle reasoning and flexible dealing so that one can get around feeling generally coherent about the choice made. Nevertheless, the commonplaceness of these decisions does not make them irrelevant to more general reasoning one usually has for veiling. For instance, a person who believes in the necessity of keeping the religion at bay in public might be open-minded toward being fashionable in one's outfit, and another who sees the veiling as an effective means of protecting female weakness might agree that wearing make-up is not prohibited for the veiled. The reasoning process is by no means always consistent in itself; in some cases, the unexamined holding on to certain beliefs one accepts when choosing to veil will contradict one's rationale of making more concrete decisions on how to cope with life, resulting in conceptual confusion or even actual dissembling behavior for those concerned. In the preceding cases, the rise of moral hypocrisy among the veiled is believed to be a vexing problem plaguing the Tunisian society right now: some of the veiled are seen as failing the general social expectations for a modest Muslim. These complaints should first be understood in terms of beliefs the veiled are holding, so that we can determine if there are any conflicts between different justifications for handling different situations. For instance, to examine the 'hypocrisy' of one veiled hanging out in a nightclub is to first determine whether there is any actual contradiction between being modest and joining mixed-gender activities. Therefore I believe that individual reasoning must be taken into account when defining the choice of veiling as free, and in the following chapter I am going to further illustrate my point through making an exemplary examination of the question concerning *fitna*, as the central concept of one popular branch of belief on veiling. In this process we will see how a confused understanding of questions

around this concept will lead to the guilt of being 'hypocrite', and why it is important to remove this unnecessary guilt through practical reasoning.

Chapter Three *Fitna* and the Universal Norms of Practical Reason

In the preceding chapter, I have already shown from individual cases that the story behind one's choice of veiling is more complex than earlier discussions in this regard assumes. Further, I have suggested practical reasoning to be a crucial element for deciding concrete matters in the daily life of the veiled, and argued that critical examination of one's held beliefs regarding veiling is indispensible for our defining the choice as truly free. In this chapter I will develop my proposed argument through examining the concept of '*fitna*' in order to show how a clear reasoning over questions around this concept can help remove the guilt found in many of my informants.

When I asked for the main purpose of veiling, frequently I would get the answer from my informants that it is for the protection of women. The typical arguments around this point can be seen in the words of Hajer, a veiled young woman working as administrative staff at one college: "Since men are created with stronger sexual desire than women, and women are endowed with *fitna*, the veiling can protect women from the lustful look of the men. As a result, whenever a man wants to have sex with a woman he has to marry her." For other similar arguments it is the belief of some that the wearing of hijab functions to facilitate women in entering the public space so that they can receive the same respect the men aspire for in terms of their intellect rather than the sexually attractive body. For those sticking to this argument, women should be first de-sexualized to be active in the public sphere, and the veiling is considered as suitable for this purpose. Another common seen way of arguing for this point is through making an analogy between the veiling and the hiding of precious goods, namely, since the precious goods must be kept hidden to prevent the theft, the female body, which is highly valued, should also be covered to protect it from potential harm.

Despite of the difference in phrasing, these arguments can be considered as similar in their basic assumption that women are physically structured to be different from men in terms of the sexual-arousing character of female body and its natural vulnerability, and different dress code must be therefore applied to women and men respectively. *Fitna* as defined in the preceding contexts can best capture this essential physical difference between genders, namely, the female body when exposed improperly will provoke the sexual desire of men, and such provocative characteristic must be kept under control so that the public interaction(presumably non-sexual) between genders can be carried out. These ideas are intuitively appealing, for after all in the pure biological sense the female body is distinctive to the male body, and the sexual

arousing aspect is one important question to be considered when it comes to the discussion of proper way of dress. Yet does it then justify the veiling as the most proper way of dress for women insofar as the prevention of illegal sex, especially the sexual harassment is considered? For this question more have to be said on the detailed assumptions behind each of the argument laid out above. First, although it is probably true that certain covering of body for both genders are necessary so that the general interaction between people can be carried out without unnecessary disturbance associated with sexual fantasy; therefore no human society ever exist in which the men and women remain nude as beasts (neither would such possibility be practical considering other functions served by covering the body, such as keeping the body temperature and indicating the identity of the person). Yet insofar as the veiling is considered the point is not about the general necessity of covering, rather than a very specific way of covering as presumably required by the Islamic canon. Therefore what at stake here is not the necessity for the women to cover the breast and men to cover the genital, but rather more specific necessity of covering the hair, the face, the neck, and parts from the hands and legs. If one insists on veiling as means to prevent the sexual provocative characteristic of the body the contending point is about whether such principle should reasonably include the hair and the face, or should such principle be considered as adequate at all insofar as the general social function of these body parts are concerned. For instance, those argue for the covering of face based on its being sexually provocative should also consider the other social functions the face plays in helping our identifying of a person and communicate efficiently with him/her. Further, even one can prove all these body parts as predominantly provocative, no evidence has been given to suggest that covering will be the best solution for the problem of illegal sex, or sexual harassment. There has been little evidence that the veiling can reduce the chance of having extra-marital affair, or pre-marital sex. At least in the Tunisian context if this were true people wouldn't complain about the hypocrisy of some veiled in faking to be virgin in the first place. Further, according to all of my informants the chance of getting sexual harassment is equal for the veiled and unveiled alike, and therefore it is problematic to assume that the sexual harassment, as the problem vexing the public interaction between genders, will be adequately solved by the practice of veiling, at least as the personal experience of my informants reveal. Second, let's look at what has been assumed by the argument that only veiling will allow the women to be seen as intelligent beings rather than sexual beings. If it were true that only through veiling can a woman be respected for her intelligence rather than physical beauty, would it be reasonable to believe that one won't be socially recognized for her intellectual achievement unless she veils, as the proposition logically suggests? If that were the case, how should we consider cases of

many of the outstanding Tunisian women, who are widely admired yet not veiled? [40] Further, if the society as a whole is holding prevailing bias against the female intelligence, assuming that the intellectual performance of the women will be necessarily hindered by their physical beauty, how will the picking up *hijab* in any sense challenge such a prejudice? Now we see the fundamental problem with this line of reasoning based on the seductive nature of female body, namely, it is wrong not because female body are not more sexually arousing than that of the male. Perhaps it is in a biological sense or under general cultural circumstance. It is wrong because it violates the basic principle of fair treatment, which is not to be based on the specific characters that persons might have to or against their advantage. If we would agree that it is obnoxious to treat the disabled differently because of their disability, then the same principle should be applied to the case of veiling as well, in which women should not be required to dress differently simply because they physical character of being more sexy. Finally, as for the analogy between female body and precious goods in terms of their value and need for protection, I find it both extremely implausible to assume that the value of human beings can be equated with the value of material goods, and funnily weird to assume that the sense of 'protection' offered by veiling can be compared with the protection for valued objects. Insofar the value is considered, the price we generally attaching to material goods, which is relative and comparable, is of fundamental difference with the intrinsic values of human beings, which are arguably absolute and incomparable. For this point, it is commonly held as true that the value of human being resides in the dignity of some of our natural rights, which is not to be sold at any price. Therefore, it will be the travesty of reason to assume that women today will give up their right of self-determination so long as they are offered with a comfortable material life. Precisely because of this essential difference between the value of goods and value of human being, the protection for human can not be confused with the protection for the precious goods; thus although it is reasonable to lock the precious goods in closet, it will be absurd to suggest that women must also be grounded at home in order to have their security protected. Some arguing for the analogy between the value of women and value of precious goods hold another essentialist assumption, namely, the physical vulnerability of women somehow calls for veiling as an efficient measure of protection, yet such vulnerability is not at all clearly defined to determine what kind of protection is necessary. For some of the students I knew, the vulnerability of women is compared with the

[40] The general profile of Tunisian women is generally known as being outspoken and secular rather than veiled and pious, and many of the unveiled women are well-established in the Tunisian society and respected for their personal success as well. In the following report the success of Ms. Faiza Kefi and Amel Bouchamaoui will support this point, see
http://www.wrmea.com/backissues/1098/9810064b.html

vulnerability of beautiful flowers. This highly fugitive saying might be understood as a literature metaphor, yet when it comes to serious argument for necessity of veiling this is not at all a valid comparison. The factors influencing the natural growth of a plant are incomparable with factors affecting the nourishment of human, which are, in an important sense, cultural and social dependent. Even when we assume that by vulnerability one is referring to the chance of getting sexual harassment, it is at all clear that veiling can be considered as an effective solution for this social problem, as we have already demonstrated earlier.

These popular arguments for veiling are not at all uncommon among the students I knew, and most of them reported to have got their understanding of this matter online or on TV. To get a general idea of what kind of information one can possible get from reading articles online or watching religious program on TV, I have searched online for Islamic website talking about veiling and followed the popular religious programs on Al-jazeera, and here I have chosen two articles on the necessities of veiling, as recommended by my Tunisian friends for further knowledge on this matter. The first one is taken from IslamOnline, one of the best known Islamic websites among Tunisian Muslims. The second article is written by Yusuf Qaradawi, who is also the presented by the Arabic channel of Al-jazeera as the religious authority in a program named "Sheikh and Life'. Many of the students I contacted are fans of Qaradawi and his interpretation on Islam.

Let's begin with the answer given by IslamOnline for the veiling first. According to the website, the main reasons for Muslim women to veil are two. First, like the precious jewelry needs to be well protected from the theft, the Muslim women are also subject to the moral guardianship of the male members within the family. These guardians are morally responsible for advising the women inside family to veil. Second, to veil is praised as the effective way of resisting the material attraction existing widely in the modern life, so that the veiled women are no longer exploited by the ruthless market economy. [41]

As for another admonition on veiling by Qaradawi, the *hijab* represents the fundamental difference between the Islamic and western philosophy in terms of modesty. On the one hand, Qaradawi blames the westerners for their exploitation of women through indulging in consumerism, where women are merely treated as cheap products. According to him women's working outside home is the illness of the

[41] IslamOnline.
http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?pagename=IslamOnline-English-Ask_Scholar/FatwaE/FatwaE&cid=1119503544268

western social institution where women are forced to become materialized into cheap products. On the other, the ideal Islamic society is defined by him as one that recognizes the women's humanity in asking for modesty in dress, and requires the husband to take up the job of financing the women when it is possible. This complementary relation as described by Islam is compared by Qaradawi to the relation between the can and its lid. Further, this arrangement is further justified by him as essential to Islam, where the women and men are created with different nature defining the most proper social role for each. Or in his original words, the difference between men and women is like the difference between the positive and negative. Therefore it is the natural duty for women to take up all household duties, most importantly, taking care of the children, and it is in accordance with the men's nature to earn the living outside home. As a contrast, Qaradawi criticizes the western kind of labor arrangement as destroying the family as the basic unit of human life. [42]

Since in the previous analysis we have already examined the analogy between women's value and that of the jewelry, and said that the dignity of human being can not be compared with the market price of any valuable commodity. Here let us take a look at other main arguments made by the two articles cited here, namely, the veiling can help fighting consumerism, and it is a purely western idea that women should be granted with the right of working outside home. First, insofar as the western emphasis on material consumption is considered, is it the case that the hijab will effectively control one's desire of consumption? It seems intuitively true that women won't be able to spend on a wide range of fashionable wear once picks up the hijab, which is generally believed to be plain in color and unanimous in style. Yet this is not at all true when we look at the real cases of the veiled women today; at least under the Tunisian context to veil by no means equals to being more economical and less fashionable. Many of my veiled friends spend a great deal in buying different sets of hijab and small trinkets, and it is not uncommon for the more wealthy ones to possess Gucci bags and L.V. purse. Further, a greater problem with this assumption lies with its equating the dressing sexy with inviting sex. According to the criticism of these articles on the western society, the women in the West are treated as mere objects because they have to expose their bodies lavishly in the popular media, which in turn indicates the over-obsession of the westerners on sex. On a symbolic level it might be disputable whether over-exposure of nude women in popular culture is equivalent to

[42] In another book titled *The Status of Woman in Islam*, Qaradawi argues in further details for the idea that femininity is of fundamental difference with masculinity, as prescribed by God through creation. According to him, the natural weakness of women makes necessary for the husbands to work outside home and support the wives. See Yusuf Qaradawi, *The Status of Woman in Islam*, http://www.witness-pioneer.org/vil/Books/Q_WI/women_feminine.htm

objectifying women, and whether this over-exposure will necessarily result in the increase of public interest in sex, yet such cultural debate is not at all relevant here. Insofar as the dress code in the West is concerned dressing sexy is not the same with inviting sex or encouraging free sex. When it comes to personal choice of attire dressing less (which for sure, has to be basically decent), like the veiling, should be considered as different individual decision on what to wear, provided that the social institution concerned allows such choice to be made. Such choice is guaranteed regardless of the individual opinions on the matter; therefore it won't be allowed for one considers dressing sexy as objectifying women to sexually harass a women dressing sexy, or one opponent of the veil to actually take it off from another person's head. Further when it comes to the statistics, it is not at all clear that given such difference in the popular sex culture the western societies will actually have higher rate of sex-related crimes than their Islamic counterparts, provided that these crimes can be effectively identified by the social institution concerned in the first place. Second, in regard of Qaradawi's argument for essential difference between women and men as the theological basis for labor division, it is problematic how such nature can be accurately defined to be used as justification for concrete social arrangements. Take the femininity as an example, if under one context it is taken as the *fitna*, the natural attractiveness of women, and under another as maturity, how is an essence contingently defined as such going to give any substantial support for the proper rights of different gender? Most of these arguments for gender essentialism are figurative in diction, in Qaradawi's case, the "male and female are complementary in Islam like the can to the lid", and "the male and female are unlike as the positive to negative." [43] Yet it is enigmatically confusing how the relation between the can and its lid can be compared with the relation between husband and wife, where a complicated deal of rights and duties are involved. Not to mention that is not at all clear how is the account for "negative and positive" (of what? subatomic particles?) going to support the argument that women are more suitable to stay at home, and men to the working outside.

If my preceding analysis on the reasoning given by my Tunisian informants and their admired religious scholars on veiling is correct, then one crucial question to ask is, why does the fallacies in their reasoning process happen, and further, how is having conceptual confusions on the ideas around *fitna* going to influence one's actual living? If as we have already pointed out, the veiling can neither be sufficiently justified by appealing to the analogy between women and precious goods, nor the essential

[43] Yusuf Qaradawi, *The Status of Woman in Islam*, http://www.witness-pioneer.org/vil/Books/Q_WI/women_feminine.htm

difference between women and men in terms of their nature given its dubious definition in the context, then what can be said about the truth that none of my interviewees had ever questioned such these assumptions? It is ok for some one to pick up the veil without thinking clearly about the beliefs adopted during the very process of choosing? Putting question in this way my intention is not to suggest that the veiling practice per se can not be sufficiently justified in a reasonable manner, for sure it can, as we shall soon see in my introducing of arguments of Barazangi on this subject. Rather, what concerns me here is whether the practical reasoning is to be included in our judgment of an individual choice as truly free. To determine on this issue we must first turn to the question that what is so bad about practicing the veil yet having some conceptual confusion over the debate behind? Isn't this the case with majority of our human activities, which we have acquired from coping with our social environment without giving most of them a clear thought? Isn't it too demanding to state that one must be clear and certain about the choice one is making so that the choice can be considered as free thereof? To be sure, the confusion that my informants had on the implications of veiling is merely one of the many puzzles we are facing up to naturally in the daily experience; although given the my current research focus we have examined conflicting ideas around the veiling, this does not make the case of veiling more special than other issues such as the same-sex marriage and women's spiritual status, which are also of great concern within the Tunisian context currently. In all these cases the students I knew were experiencing the real urge to defend their religion, which was perceived by them as being under severe threat from the external world, and for many of them the anxiety about the status as being Muslims today under an authoritarian regime and sincerity to present the best side of Islam wee heartfelt. For one grows up within an Islamic society and exposes to news on the unfair treatment of Islam, it is not only difficult but perhaps ontologically impossible to entirely distance oneself from sensitive issues concerning the honor of one's cherished religion, and reach a total cool-headed judgment of what is going on. Therefore I would agree that confusions as exhibited previously in the arguments held by people regarding the *hijab* are impossible if one does not commits oneself seriously to the question concerned and finds personal significance within the subject in the first place. Yet to admit one's ontological condition and its impact on the reasoning over certain issues is not the same with acknowledging the confusions rising in the process as insignificant or unavoidable. In the above cases, those are convinced that *fitna* is defined as the women's being naturally seductive, and the veiling must be adopted in order to solve social problems brought by such natural attractiveness such as sexual harassment and extramarital sex, then one is saying at the same time that it will be natural that the unveiled would be sexually harassed, or it

is certain that the sex relation between people will go out of control without the institutional requirement of veiling; both are unlikely to be true given that coming from a culture where veiling is not required I do not find the sexual harassment more severe in any Chinese city I have lived than that in the Tunisian capital, nor the general interest of public in matters concerning sex. Yet believing the correlation between *fitna* and the occurrence of sex-related social problem a woman is likely to suffer from a constant feeling of guilt about her own body. In the case of Tunisia such guilt is not at all psychological abstraction; it is concretely expressed by the small decisions such as not wearing the made-ups in public, not walking hand in hand with men in public, not going to nightclubs in the evening, not swimming without a full-covering swim suit and etc. These are crucial components for what is considered as appropriate socially for the veiled to do by the general public. If one veiled woman requires herself to observe all these conventional norms on the account of her belief in *fitna*, then it is understandable why in earlier cases Sausa feels the stacking of repression for her rigid sticking to the norms for the veiled, and Leila complains about suffering from the stiffening formalism of veiling. This is so, because, aware or not, neither of them can live at ease with the idea that women's bodies are destructively seductive, as their belief in *fitna* suggests. This is why for Sausa the self-disciplining as required by veiling becomes the accumulation of repression of otherwise naturally existing needs, and for Leila the living up to daily particulars prescribed by veiling amounts to the excruciating drudgery. Even for cases like Salsabi who does not complain about the daily observing of the rules for the veiled as trying, she has to worry about being called hypocrite so long as she breaks a particular rule in daily behavior. To be clearly, the point here is not about the appropriateness of detailed decisions such as wearing the make-up or hanging out with men, nor is it about the regulative role that moral principle would play in reality. First of all, it is not my contention that wearing make up is the natural need of women and the practice of veiling has repressed such need. Rather, my consideration is that in any case the decision concerning the make-up can not be reasonably supported by referring to the *fitna* thus defined. Therefore, what at stake is not about choosing to not walk hand in hand with men in the streets per se; it is about choosing to do so and having a good reason for doing it at the same time. The problem with these Tunisian students is not that through veiling some of them choose to lead a Spartan life, restraining from all physical pleasure and material temptation; it is about having a good argument for reasons of making such a choice so that the actual living with such heightened self-discipline will be felt as positively inspiring rather than negatively repressive. The good argument requires thorough understanding of the questions implied by one's choice and rigid reasoning over the points concerned, so that one's original beliefs

held up to earlier can be examined in terms of their validity and carried out with more resoluteness and flexibility. In the case of veiling, to have a good argument means to be able to reason fairly over the matter so that one does not have to follow the public expectations for the veiled all the time if one has a good reason to deviate. For instance, if the dominating opinion says that the veiled should not walk hand in hand with men in public because of the natural *fitna* of women, then one may reason that the public exhibition of personal love is also a basic right that should not be overridden by the religious requirement of modesty, or one may even ask further whether the modesty as required by Islam should be interpreted to exclude all public showing of intimacy. Through questioning in this way one will be unlikely to be torn between the need to interact normally with the men on the one hand and the fear of being called hypocrite on the other, and the prevailing prescription on what is supposed to do will lose its grip on this particular situation for an individual. Yet as the case study previously mentioned has shown, because of the lack of such a reasoning process in most of the cases, these students were either suffering from the stringent prohibitions prescribed by the popular idea of *fitna*, or feeling guilty of being 'hypocrite' through breaking the law of modesty as it is commonly defined. Second when it comes to the nature of any moral principle for sure the regulative nature is what defines the principle as self-imposed, thus free. Therefore I am not arguing against the detailed requirements made by veiling because of their being prohibitive; it is always possible to imagines some one good at practical reasoning will actually choose to lead a strictly self-disciplined life. Therefore when it comes to my critique for Sausa and her talking about repressions that a veiled has to endure my point is not to say ideally any repressions should not exist, or the adopting of practical reasoning will necessarily remove one from self-discipline, which is by nature, prohibitive. In her case she believes in the *fitna* as women's endowed nature, and opposes the wearing of make-up because its increasing of the dangerous attractiveness of women in public. Yet she also reveals to have tried the make-up privately at home where the concept of *fitna* is no longer applicable (given that the members inside household are not marriageable males). If this can be sufficiently justified by the modesty principle as she holds up, then why would there be any repression in the first place? If one is at total ease with living such clearly split life in accordance with the principle of modesty, why should the domestic life be thought as compensating the loss in the public one? Shouldn't these two worlds be as harmonized as the Imam Qaradawi describes by the 'positive vis-à-vis negative' metaphor? Sausa reports as having the need to unleash her repressed needs through doing what is prohibited in public at home, including wearing the make-up and dressing in beautiful T-shirts. Repression as such is not quite the result of positive self-discipline but rather the consequence of

deeper uncertainty over what is the more natural thing to do. Precisely because Sausa can not fully agree with the implications of *fitna*, that women are already attractive by their nature and should hide such attractiveness properly in public, she is troubled by feeling on the one hand, the need to look better, and on the other, the need to be modest as she believes it; the repression for her is resulted from the unsolvable conflict between these two kinds of need she is struggling with simultaneously. Conceptually Sausa is confused over whether the need to look good and the need to be modest can be combined with each other, and such confusion burdens her through causing the repression of one need over another. Yet this is totally avoidable if Sausa reflects critically on her held idea on *'fitna'*, as the crucial concept underlying her understanding of modesty, through asking questions such as "isn't the wearing of T-shirts and make-up choices worthy of same consideration in terms of their expression of natural needs other than the need for spirituality", or further "is it the case that the Islamic requirement for modesty leaves no room for the individual expression of beauty and fashion?" These are all questions Sausa encounters when choosing to veil; a reflective thinking over these questions can result in greater consistency in the decisions one makes, making one less likely to be disturbed by the negative repression.

Since we have mentioned the practical reasoning as the crucial capacity to be included in making a truly free choice, some further remarks have to be given for this very concept and its philosophical implication. As I have shown earlier, when put under critical scrutiny, the ideas people generally hold about *fitna*, as one crucial concept underlying some interpretations for the veiling, is not as consistent and well-supported as they appear to be. Conceptual confusions and weak analogies abound when we examine the assumptions behind some familiar line of reasoning that my informants used during our conversation. Further, I have also demonstrated that the conceptual confusions as such are by no means innocuous and inconsequential, for they can result in unnecessary mental burden and actual dissembling behaviors in individual cases when left unsolved. Such observation leads to one of my main argument in this thesis, namely, being able to reason clearly over ideas assumed behind the choice one made and have a good argument about it should be considered as one crucial aspect for that choice to be considered as truly free. In this sense, the self-initiated veiling of my Tunisian informants in the earlier cases are not truly liberating, since insofar as the debate on *fitna* is concerned no one made an argument which is strong enough to sustain critical scrutiny. This point warrants further clarification. First of all, I consider the reasoning referred here as one crucial human capacity that is fully universal, namely, it is valid and applicable for people and communities across

culturally. Since my theoretical concerns for choosing this stance have been already clarified in the first chapter, here I will make a further exposition on this point through responding to the individual cases I mentioned earlier. Although in cases like Sausa and Leila they reported to be actually repressed by their sticking to the social expectations for the veiled, in other cases people were simply doing fine with their veiling experience. For Nadia, Zounuba and Salwa there is no apparent conflict between living as a modern citizen and a modest Muslim, as least according to their conversations with me. Nadia and Zounuba managed to justify their respective using of perfume and wearing colorful hijab through referring to the modern requirement for modesty, and Salwa even allies with the governmental ban for hijab despite her adopting of the attire in practice. Does this suggest that our proposal for practical reasoning is not applicable for their case? In other words, even they are sharing the same popular view on *fitna* with Sausa and Leila, since practically they are not at all troubled by the inconsistence between the assumptions they held in this regard, why should we insist that it is necessary for them to have a critical examination on their beliefs? This leads back to the question I raised earlier, namely, if in reality the conceptual confusions over issues of great concern for us are unavoidable, and most of us can come up with temporary justifications for what we chose to do under one situation without noticing the general consistence of stances we have taken, why it is so important to insist on the use of practical reasoning in examining systematically what we have believed in particular cases? If it is up to individual choice when it comes to the thorough exploitation of the natural world and discovery of scientific laws, why shouldn't the cultivation of one's practical reason be an individual choice rather than an inescapable duty, as I have suggested? These are legitimate challenges to my argument of reasoning as necessary condition for a free choice, and to answer them we will see if the common ground can be achieved on the following points. First and most importantly, to define practical reason as one indispensible human capacity is to suggest logically that this capacity is so significant to the extent that we can not be considered as human being any more when being deprived of it. In its most basic sense, the practical reasoning asks about what is a good and desirable human life, and inquires on this question not only as an individual with particular interests but a member of a shared human community. The existence of a human society depends on the common capacity shared by different individuals in envisaging and acting for this possibility of betterment, and to legislate beyond oneself makes possible the justice of a fair social share of benefits gained collectively. This seek of good can be agreed upon cross-culturally as the common end, although the specific means toward this end is arguably different under different cultural contexts. In our current context practical reasoning stands for the capacity of examining the accepted arguments regarding the

veiling critically; this is contrary to passively conform to the popular sayings on this matter, or sympathetically accept anything said to be derived from Islamic tenets. Such a capacity is indispensible because as human beings the students concerned should naturally aspire to a well-examined life where one's considerations for crucial life decisions are carefully sorted out, rather than a conformist life following whatever is available in a close environment. Second, to name the practical reason as a capacity is to admit that the actual conditions in the real cases will influence the realization of this shared human potentiality; therefore although ideally these students should be able to perform the same kind of analysis I have made earlier for the popular ideas and religious doctrines they have received on the veiling, I am also aware that in reality such reasoning has to be motivated by one's willingness to empathize with another culture that is different from one's own, as well as externally supported by broader social arrangements like the liberal education within schools and the legal protection for freedom of conscience and freedom of speech. Some of these conditions are arguably unavailable in the Tunisian context, where one will normally find great difficulty in sympathizing with the western culture, which is considered as systematically biased against Islam. Further, according to the observation of university professors I have talked with, the liberal education in regard of religion is very limited in the country due to the government's fear for religious extremism; not to mention the country's very poor record in providing its citizens with the freedom of speech. As I shall show later, most students tend to take a defensive stance when it comes to matters regarding Islam, making thinking the issue from an alternative perspective quite difficult. This predominant tendency of siding with Islam has definitely facilitated some fallacious religious indoctrination to be passed as truthful rendering of the religious tenets. Further, the insistence on practical reasoning in the individual cases is important, because it is commonly the case that the different beliefs we naturally have at one time will only turn out to be contradictory or untenable when we make efforts in pressing them critically in the reflection process. For instance, although Nadia, the young woman I used in the first example of last chapter, has lived in peace with her commitment to the equal standing of women in public life and her belief in *fitna* as one crucial reason for the veiling, these two ideas will contradict each other once being put under closer scrutiny: if the idea of *fitna* is true, namely, women are physically less suitable for taking up jobs outside home, then how should they be entitled to the equal opportunity that Nadia insists as crucial for the understanding of citizenship? Further, if she is consistent in arguing that the company should not make a person's choice of dress one aspect for the employment decision, how is she going to stay with the idea of *fitna* which insists that women won't be respected for her intellect unless they wear the veil? Is she now saying that it

is somehow understandable if the company refuses to recruit a woman for her being unveiled, as her personal religious belief seems to suggest? These questions can be argued for or against the original stance Nadia was taking, but they won't show up as serious questions if one does not make efforts in tracking different arguments down. This can explain why some are unaware of the hidden inconsistency of the popular sayings they took to be true at one time, and precisely because it is not the case that contradicting beliefs will automatically figure themselves out when reach us first as popular sayings, it is important to emphasize that practical reasoning is a more reliable device for this task.

Insofar as the practical reasoning as universal human capacity is concerned I have to bring into discussion the argument for Islamic-relativism among a few Muslim feminists. One typical way of arguing this point is like this, namely, the understanding of rights within Islam is closely associated with the idea of modesty and complementary relation between genders, which is essentially different from the western understanding of rights which is connected with the consumerist culture and individualism; veiling is the concrete embodiment of such ideological dichotomy between the Islamic and western thinking.[44] This line of reasoning is widely found in people I knew during the field trip, and for some of them the veiling expresses the opposition against all western corruption from liberty of sex to materialism. This stance is found problematic in the following aspects: first of all, modesty or consumerism aside, isn't there a basic commitment to justice and public debate for achieving this end within the Islamic society, which is not different in nature with the idea for liberty and equality within the western context? In this sense the veiling does not only have a cultural aspect, as stood for by the debate between 'modesty' and 'consumerism', but as a social practice it is also connected with what a rational member within the community considers as good and right to do. Therefore when arguing that veiling is the modest way of dress for women one is not only speaking as a believer, with the hope to address the religious community only, but as a citizen within a larger civic community one is at the same time proposing a systematic understanding of women's status, which is to be further decided by other members of the community in terms of its compatibility with more general protocols of the society. As the earlier cases have shown, insofar as individual reasoning is concerned the

[44] For examples of this kind of argument see Soroya Duyal, "New Veils and New Voices: Islamist Women's Groups in Egypt," in *Women and Islamization: Contemporary Dimensions of Discourses on Gender Relations*, ed. Karin Ask and Marit Tjomsland(New York; Berg, 1998) and Pamela K. Taylor, "I Just Want to Be Me: Issues in Identity for One American Muslim Woman," in *The Veil: Women Writers on its History, Lore, and Politics*, ed. Jennifer Heath(California: University of California Press, 2008).

reasoning over the religious significance of the veiling can not be really distinguished from the reasoning over more general public arrangement regarding the religious practice. In many situations the public policy and its underlying principle, when well exposed through reflection, will directly challenge the religious reasoning one uses in private, and vice versa. In our earlier discussion of *fitna* in the context of Tunisia, such challenge is most vividly illustrated by one's entitlement to secular legal rights on the one hand and the personal attachment to the popular religious interpretation of *fitna* on the other. Leaving such conceptual contradiction unresolved will not only result in confusion but also a split or lethargy of public debate in the long run. Yet such a debate is nevertheless unavoidable if the community as a whole is going to keep its commitment to justice, which depends on the individual use of practical reasoning on a public scale. Therefore, it is my contention that to reason over the nature of the veiling practice, not merely as a cultural product of one's particular environment but as the religious practice within a broader civic community, should be found necessary in the western and Islamic society alike. Second, the categorical division held by the Islamic-relativist is also untenable when it comes to the actual function of the veiling and the fair evaluation of the western society. As we have already mentioned, given the lack of substantial evidence, it is implausible to assume that the veiling can provide the panacea for social problems like sexual harassment and extramarital sex; still less problems such as consumerism and materialism which are metaphysical in definition. Not to mention that libertine sex culture and consumerism can not provide a whole picture of what is happening within the major western societies. After all, the spread of sex culture on media won't be possible if the freedom of speech is not first guaranteed by law in the first place, and in principle the public mania with material consumption does not hinder the society concerned from committing to the general fairness of wealth distribution or the well-fare of the less advantaged. Again, insofar as the general concern for justice and good is concerned there is no distinctive dichotomy between an Islamic society and a western one as the relativist argument assumes.

Furthermore, the idea of practical reasoning is not purely a western concept as the Islamic relativists would suggest. The argument developed by Nimat Hafez Barazanqi, a Syrian feminist scholar and educator in Qu'ran, in her book *Woman's Identity and the Qu'ran: A New Reading* will serve as a good example for how practical reasoning can be rendered under the Islamic context. The main argument of Barazanqi in her proposed new pedagogue of Q'uran is to practice Islam in the real sense one must first be able to read the relevant religious texts critically through independent reasoning. Bazrzanqi has addressed this point especially with Muslim women, who have been

assigned a secondary status with the religious community and excluded from interpreting the religious canons thereof historically. This in turn further perpetuates women's intellectual subordination when it comes to the reading of religious texts; therefore Barazanqi sees the necessity of enhancing not only the literacy of women but as well their capacity of critical thinking regarding religious matters. [45]Therefore, Barazanqi has redefined the nature of human beings in the Islamic context as '*mutaqqi*', namely, the follower of the principle of '*taqwa*'. Unlike the Islamic relativists, who consider the ideas of reason and rights as mere western, Barazanqi has developed the Islamic version of universal reason from the idea of '*taqwa*'. According to her, '*taqwa'*, defined as the balance between the individual choice and social action, represents the moral ideal that a Muslim should aspire to achieve; one's ability to exercise the endowed free will through reasoning openly on matters concerning the good of oneself and the community is a necessary means toward the end of '*taqwa*'. Thus for Barazanqi the nature of Muslims as human beings resides in their capacity of practical reasoning in matters concerning the society and religion, and this holds true for men and women alike. When it comes to the veiling, Barazanqi reinterprets the Q'uranic chapters regarding *hijab*, arguing that the primary meaning of veiling resides in its emphasis for privacy and protection for lineage, as expressed by the idea of modesty. Yet different from the popular preaching that usually associates modesty with *fitna*, Barazanqi emphasizes the necessity of having moral autonomy prior to the observation of the social protocol of modesty. Therefore to be considered as really practicing Islam rather than merely conforming to the existing social norms the woman who decides to veil must have a good understanding of the modesty as mentioned by Q'uran, so that she won't feel guilty about her body or be perplexed by the prevailing negative stigma of female sexuality. Further, the priority of the moral autonomy will allow the women more flexibility in making the decision of veiling under different social circumstances; if one has a good reason to believe that the general social convention on veiling is unjust, it is reasonable for one to decide not to follow the practice and the code of modesty as it is defined in this concrete context. My understanding of this principle is, the code of modesty, however defined within one social context, should not override other human rights that are agreed as more basic according to practical reasoning. For instance, the woman can refuse the veil if she is coerced to do so by parents or other family members; for in that case individual liberty defeats the requirement of modesty. Further, if the state as a whole imposes the code of modesty on women on account of the *fitna*, then one should be able to oppose the practice based on its misrepresentation of what Islam actually requires. In the case

[45] Nimat Hafez Barazangi, *Woman's Identity and the Qu'ran: A New Reading*(Gainesville: University Press of Florida: 2004): 3-8.

of Tunisia, since the legal rights of women regarding marriage, education and inheritance are all guaranteed by the civic law, and can not be violated on by any religious obligation, the case of veiling is more about the use of practical reasoning in individual cases, so that one can have a good argument about this issue before making the choice. Or at the very least they won't simply follow the popular idea of *fitna* and suffer from the unnecessary guilt of being sexually tempting men.

One important background to be brought into our analysis of cases with the Tunisian students is the wide belief within the Muslim community that Islam has been unfairly treated in the world today, and it is the critical time to defend one's religion. Back to the first chapter I described my encounter with a taxi driver, who made a plea for my saying something positive about Islam. Such deep-seated worry that Muslims are systematically stereotyped is shared in varying degrees by all the people I have come to know within the country. Daily reports from Aljazeera and the local newspaper are the best sources if one is looking for evidence showing the misery of Muslims in war-ravaged places; daily headlines showcase the bloody scenario across the region: injured children in Palestine by the fire of Israel, and civilians killed by suicide-bombers in Iraq or Afghanistan. These daily covering of unfortunate incidents in some cases raisesw strong indignation, and I will list two cases to show this point. Hasan(male) is a well-established calligrapher making his living on selling his amazing Islamic handwritings and designs, and I have been friends with him since my first visit to the country back in 2007. In his mid-thirties, Hasan is soft-spoken and moderate, and his knowledge regarding the Q'uran and the anecdotes of Prophet Mohammed never ceases to amaze me. Yet he loses his temper every time when discussing with me the Middle Eastern politics. For him the brutality of Israel and its ally U.S. has predominantly caused the interminable suffering of people in the region, and to destroy the occupying force is the only solution for the continuing conflict. His deep-seated anger for foreign interference in the region is shared by Yosr, a veiled student majored in mathematics. Young and talented, Yosr is among the best in class and very popular among her friends for her warm-heartedness and extrovert character. Yet one thing distinctive of Yosr is her having a clear political agenda expressed through the veiling, namely, according to her one important reason leading to her choice of the hijab is to defend Islam and protest against the Zionism. In the words of her friend, the hijab in this case resembles the emblem on the shoulder of a soccer team leader: like the team leader who has to take up the responsibility of guiding the whole team during the match and representing the best of the team, a veiled woman shoulders the responsibility of showing the best of Islam. For Yosr I am the first non-Muslim she came to know, and in every opening of her conversation she would

add "in our Islam", worrying that as an outsider I will be easily influenced by the overwhelming negative reports on the extremist side of the religion. Although as a friend I enjoyed her company, the way Yosr showed her resistance of Zionism seems eccentric to me: she not only boycotts Coco-cola and other American made products for their sponsorship for Zionist activities, but refused to watch BBC for its ideological affiliation with the occupying Israeli force in Palestine. It is predictable that for both Hasan and Yosr the religious necessity of veil is not subject to any dispute, and any criticism on the practice would be condemned as western prejudice against Islam, or the misrepresentation for what Muslims actually believe. In private I do value these two friends for their sincerity and personal integrity, yet in retrospect what troubles me is a general assumption underlying their passionate reaction to the existing injustice in the region, namely, there is a systematic prejudice against Muslims in the western world, and such prejudice is omnipresent in every from of contact between Islam and the West. In the first chapter I mentioned the *Orientalism* of Said to draw attention to the more theoretical rendering of this idea now found popular within the Muslim community in Tunisia. The point is not to say that that lamentable human loss on the Muslim side and popular ignorance over matters concerning Islam never happened as they believed. Rather, the main concern here is about a more rational way of approaching these issues so that one does not merely take sides based on emotions alone. In the case of the return of *hijab* in Tunisia my observation reveals that critical thinking of principles behind one's choice is highly inadequate among the students I know, and this can not be considered as irrelevant to the general political background where people feel their cherished religion is under threat. After all, if the prevailing sentiment within this situation is the need to defend the wronged Islam, then how can one be distanced enough to make a more lucid judgment of diverging beliefs around an issue as sensitive as the veiling? In my conversations with the young Tunisians terms like "reason" and "basic human rights' are disconcerting given their political association with the 'bully West', yet in reality none of these students could actually do without committing to issues regarding practical reasoning and basic rights in one way or another. For instance, one basic assumption behind the protest of many against the prejudice against Islam is that one group of people should be treated differently because of their basic religious belief, and to reach this basic point we need the practical reasoning that goes beyond the immediate circumstances of our own. Besides, many final-year students I know were busy with job-hunting last summer, and only to that point would they begin to see how important it is for the country to insist that women should be granted equal opportunities in employment. Therefore for these students they would tell me that a secure job and an independent income are crucial constituents for a good life that they

aspire to lead; although they found little reason to oppose the popular idea of *fitna* that women are more suitable physically to live at home. In this case the reasoning has already been partly applied when one argues for the essential role of employment in one's own case, and the adoption of practical reasoning will allow one to reason more generally about the necessity of having an equal opportunity of participating in public life, which will then allow one to see the implausibility of the idea of *fitna*. It is based on these considerations I am arguing for including practical reasoning as one important aspect for a free choice when it comes to the veiling. In this regard I believe that Said is on the same track of promoting genuine understanding between Islam and the West, yet a more urgent question to be asked here is about the means toward this humanistic end. For Said the common ground can be mainly achieved through our shared human capacity of empathy, as he puts it in *Representation of Intellectual*, that a true intellectual should "always tied to and ought to remain an organic part of an ongoing experience in society: of the poor, the disadvantaged, the voiceless, the unrepresented, the powerless". [46]Yet the point seems to have overlooked the fact that empathy can be severely limited by the immediate environment we find most familiar, nor is the disadvantaged always on the side of truth. In the cases of Hasan and Yosr, their empathy with Palestinians as the weaker side in the Israeli-Arab conflict has been greatly influenced by the Islamic society they are living in, making it difficult for them to see the human face of the demonized West. Not to mention that the disadvantaged groups are not at all immune from violating other groups' basic rights, as the Hamas's brutal killing of Israeli civilians and Fatha's autocratic ruling over its own people have adequately proved. In the earlier analysis, I have already mentioned that the practical reasoning as an essential human capacity is situated itself within concrete social conditions, and general social arrangements like liberal education and freedom of speech can have a great bearing on how well the citizens within one community can actual perform in their reasoning. In the cases of the disadvantaged groups it is more likely that these basic social institutions are not adequately provided for them or fully developed in the societies they are living in, which make it more difficult for these people to rise above their own predicament and look at sensitive issues from other perspectives. Theoretically this makes the practical reasoning more urgent for the disadvantaged groups if the humanist goal outlined by Said can ever be realized.

Giving the reason that practical reasoning should be considered as crucial for the choice of veiling and how it can be applied in the debate on *fitna*, in the next chapter I will attempt to discuss the ontological significance of veiling. The main reason for

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[46] Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectuals* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996): 113.

this inquiry turns out to be a crucial puzzle when I approach the question concerning the veil through the liberal stance of choice. One most important assumption underlying the choice argument is that human beings are capable of moral judgment independent of the natural determination. The free will must be presumed so that it makes sense to talk about the practical reasoning rising beyond one's familiar circumstance. Such a vision of human agency is theoretically ideal, where one can reasonably aspire to be under one situation; while at the same time the practical reasoning makes sure that the aspiration thus achieved will be inclusive enough to cover all the rational beings provided with the same situation. Although the capacity approach as delineated by Nussbaum starts with what are actually available to people under one circumstance, the possibility of envisaging a list of basic human capacities nevertheless depends on the reasoning process that goes beyond what one has been assigned with in his/her particular situation. Since the concept of choice concerns essentially with the capacity of reason, both in its public and private use, it is by definition free from the influences of one's concrete social and cultural conditions. It follows that the same group of standards should be applied for us to judge one choice as free, and these standards are not themselves subject to further dispute based on cultural differences. Therefore in my case if I have successfully argued that in order for a choice of veiling to be considered as free some conditions must be fulfilled, which include the protection for liberty of conscience and freedom of speech and the capacity of practical reasoning, then it follows that these conditions should be applied equally to the Tunisian, Chinese and French society alike. This implies that the choice of veiling in Tunisia shouldn't be considered as free if the government violates the liberty of conscience of the veiled through introducing the compulsive ban, and it also implies that the individual choice of *hijab* shouldn't be considered as free if one does not have a good argument for the choice concerned. At the same time the recent French ban of *niqab* will be judged as unjust for the same reason of liberty of conscience, and the state protection initiated by the Chinese government is not sufficient to consider the choice of veiling as free given the lack of freedom of speech inside the country. Such a model seems perfectly right until we ask a more basic question: does it make any sense at all to talk about the choice of veiling in the Chinese context? Here I am not saying that the veiling of some Chinese Muslim minorities won't be understood by mainstream Chinese culture, or their rights as citizens to practice their religion can not be actually denied in reality. Rather, I am referring to a more basic relation people in the Chinese context normally have with a practice such as veiling, which determines in a fundamental way whether the practice will be significant at all for an average Chinese. According to the choice model, this aspect as been left as the cultural meaning of the attire, which is not be taken into

account insofar as the general rationales regarding free choice are concerned. Yet the story will be entirely different if we assume that Heidegger is right in pointing out the ontological relation we have with objects within the world is more prior to the present-at-hand kind of relation, as the talking on reason and rights refers to. For the choice story all the nuanced cultural meanings of the veil must be left out, and the veiling remains as abstract as a general religious practice so that agreement can be achieved among different groups of people, in terms of what standards should be adopted to judge one's choice of veiling as free. However, the choice approach will also agree that as peoples with different cultural background we are not at the same starting point when talking about the choice of veiling, which as a social custom exists only in some cultures rather than all. This can be further seen as one of the uneven conditions we are assigned with at birth, which are contingent and arbitrary; hence the necessity for the practical reason to overcome this contingency. Yet the question still remains what we mean when we are saying that a social custom or cultural convention exists. In the case of veiling, does the existence here refer to the material aspect of the practice as being a piece of cloth, which is further invested with specific meanings under the particular cultural context of Islam? If that is the case, it seems reasonable to assume that any one can practice veiling so long as she puts on the attire and follow the customs as required by Islam, but is this true? Here we encounter another crucial implication of the choice story, namely, if the practice were up to one's choice, then it shouldn't only be restricted to those born within an Islamic family or culture, but is open to people without such formative cultural influences. Again, here we are not talking about the right of conversion or quitting one's assigned religion; it is a pure ontological question to ask whether it is possible at all for non-Muslim by birth to pick up the veil?

Through putting question in this way I am proposing a closer look at the meaning of having being assigned with different ontological conditions before making the choice. In our earlier discussion of free choice concerning the veil, the impact of one's assigned environment on one's making of such a decision has been left out under our focus on the possibility of achieving common ground through reasoning. Yet this does not offer us any insight into the content of the culture condition we are assigned with, nor our relations with it; such insight is nevertheless needed if the choice we are talking on the level of practical reasoning is to be considered as making sense, ontologically, in the first place. Therefore in the following chapter I will attempt to tackle this question through introducing the discussion made by Heidegger regarding how human beings as Dasein are related to the objects as equipments within the world. If the attempt is successful, then we should be able to agree that ontologically it won't

make any sense for a non-Muslim by birth to actually choose the veil, although such choice still remains possible insofar as more abstract political rights and the individual capacity of practical reasoning are concerned.

Chapter Four The Ontological Significance of Veiling

As I have discussed at end of last chapter, the manifold cultural meanings of the veil has been left out by our previous attempt to figure out the question concerning free choice, and it is important to examine the ontological significance of the veil so that we can better understand what it means to be assigned a specific cultural context, and how such an assignment is going to influence the choice we are making. Before entering into the details of the ontological story it will be helpful to first look at how previous literature talks about the meaning of veil, then, we will try to figure out the philosophical assumption of such an approach toward the question of meaning.

To illustrate how the meaning of veil has usually been discussed in previous literature, it is helpful to quote the introduction given by Jennifer Heath in her edited book *The Veil*, which includes one sentence as follows: "as much as the veil is fabric or an article of clothing, it is also a concept. It can be illusion, vanity, artifice, deception, liberation, imprisonment, euphemism, divination, concealment, hallucination, depression, eloquent silence, holiness, the ethers beyond consciousness, the hidden hundredth name of God, the final passage into death, even the biblical apocalypse, the lifting of God's veil, signaling so-called end times. When veiling is forced-then enforced-it is repression. Yet, as we see increasingly today, the veil is also a symbol of resistance-against ethnic and religious discrimination."[47] This highly condensed summary can be seen as a standard expression of the signifier and signified formula, namely, as a symbol the veil can stand for a variety of meanings depending on the specific contexts concerned in each case. If our discussion of choice is correct, then these specific contexts have been assigned to every one of us as the cultural aspect of our birth conditions. Such a broad cultural context further multiplies different personal experiences in individual cases, giving rise to the complexity of meanings that the veil can possibly stand for. One crucial point to be noticed about this way of understanding the meaning is the pivotal role of an abstract subject, who can first receive the assigned cultural meanings of a symbol, then develop it further alongside the accumulation of personal experience. Both the understanding of one's assigned cultural context and the development of personal experience depend on this ideal subject as the epistemological basis in unifying the empirical data into concrete meanings that the veil as an object stands for. In this sense we consider this approach toward the question of meaning as broadly following the subject-object model; the presumption of the ideal subject makes possible the understanding of different

[47] Jennifer Heath, ed. *The Veil: Women Writers on Its History, Lore, and Politics*(California: University of California Press, 2008): 3.

meanings of the veil, as well as its representation.

If the subject-object model were correct, namely, the signifying relation as commonly understood presumes the an abstract subject that is prior to the concrete influence of one's culture and personal experience, and makes it epistemologically possible for the manifold empirical data to be grasped as a unitary whole; then how does this basic epistemological assumption provides us with any clue for reading the relations between one's assigned cultural environment and one's being influenced by it? We can make use of more concrete arguments from the debate on veil to figure out where this assumption is going to lead us. First, according to the choice story, if we state that veiling as a social institution is unambiguously oppressive for women, then we assume that it is possible for one assigned with such a practice within the culture one born into to abandon the practice, presumably through the execution of one's free will. Further, in another extreme case if we state that veiling is the most modest way of dress that liberates women from the tempting material world, then we simultaneous assume that it is possible for one outside the Islamic community to choose the veiling based on the same free will. This vision agrees perfectly with my earlier accounts considering the question of choice from the universal human capacity, which requires certain social arrangement as well as personal endeavor to make a choice truly free. Yet one crucial problem with this ideally based choice model is that what is legally guaranteed as a choice and rationally conceived as a plausible alternative may show up to be totally out of place within the given cultural context. For instance, as an average Chinese I am legally granted the right to concert to Islam and pick up the veil, and as a feminist scholar I may intellectually find appealing the idea of modesty and simplicity as expressed by the veil, yet given my common Chinese upbringing (which is presumably atheist and preoccupied with worldly interaction between human beings) to exhibit one's virtue through adopting certain a type of dress seems alien and distant. On the other hand the similar ideas on modesty can be expressed in ways I am more familiar with such as being humble in evaluating one's own merits and committed to hard working. By the same token, although it is legally possible for a Muslim within an Islamic country to quit the veiling if she wills, and as a rational person she may have very good reasons for doing so, yet such rationalized decision does not in any sense make veiling or not matter less to her in a most intimate way. In both examples through trying to describe how differently a Chinese and an Arab would feel about the practice of veiling, I am not aiming at recapitulating something as thoughtless as the cultural diversity, namely, for certain central concepts of good the criteria people use different from one culture to another. Rather, I am asking about the relation between one and the specific culture one is assigned with in a more intimate sense, or to render

it in a more rigid way, what we are concerned with here is the ontological relation one has with a cultural practice prescribed by the culture one is assigned with. In predominantly focusing on the ideal subject and its capacity of acting morally, the choice approach has completely left out this ontological question, making it a puzzle how the same reason we use in the moral decision making can be applied to connect us with the culture we are assigned with and further help us to handle countless nuanced situations within it. This is especially so in what is generally termed as cultural custom and convention. Consider the following examples, it is arguably reasonable that the makeshift fire-crackers should be abandoned due to the potential pollution it causes and the security hazard it imposes on the user. However, the Chinese government's ban of fire-crackers during the Spring Festival has raised wide protest within many cities in China. One crucial reason behind many people's protest against the governmental ban is its introducing a fundamental change to way the Spring Festival is supposed to be experienced as a Chinese festival. For those insist on this point what is at stake is not quite the statistical measurement of the chemical effect of the fire-crackers, nor the theoretical vindication for the lighting of fire-crackers and its cultural meaning; it may be vaguely referred to as the lack of 'jie ri fen wei'(the festival atmosphere). The vagueness of the 'festival atmosphere' thus referred comes from a more general hunch of 'something being not there', which is yet too pervasive to be pinned down by definite expressions such as 'I need the firecrackers back' or 'the firecracker is the indispensible part of the festival'. It reveals itself every time one stares at the night sky at the New Year's Eve, enters shops decorated with paper-made firework models, or has a family dinner with a group of jubilant children at home. For a person has experience, the more every one else around seems to have adapted to a festival without the firecracker, the more the banned firecrackers stands out as pertinent to the festival setting in an ontological sense. To term this experience as ontological is to differentiate it from the talking of entity and its property from the subject-object stance. In this situation, what happened is not the same with first identifying in the mind one entity named the 'Chinese Festival' then coming up with all properties belonging to this item. Such pure conceptual thinking can never lead to the kind of getting around in a world one is most familiar with and finding something missing in it. Rather, to encounter the firecracker as something conspicuously standing out in the festival setting one has to first find home in a holistic of 'holiday experience' as it is under the Chinese context. This example leads up to the necessity for us to make a further theoretical distinction between the ontological investigation and the inquiry based on a broad subject-object model.

As I have already stated in the preceding paragraph, our main task here is to figure out how the arbitrarily assigned cultural context interacts with us, especially in terms of the choices we make concerning the prevailing conventions within that culture. Through the example of how an average Chinese could feel about the missing of firecrackers during the Spring Festival, I also said that the ontological relation we have with entities around us is different in kind from the 'subject-object' relation we envisage from the choice approach. This statement warrants further exposition. One basic assumption of the choice approach is about a knowing subject precedes the concrete cultural and personal experience, which makes possible to epistemologically talk about alternative options regarding one prevailing cultural convention. If we suppose that the prevailing Chinese custom regarding female modesty is the foot-binding and the Islamic counterpart as the veiling (since the discussion is purely philosophical the accuracy of the empirical cases is not a concern here), then according to the choice approach it is theoretically possible for a Chinese to choose the veiling, and a Muslim the foot-binding despite of the predominant influence their respective cultural contexts imposes on them. The cultural context in this case is seen no more than the empirical manifold which is to be gradually picked up by an individual. Since the possibility of being affected by the cultural context in the first place depends on one's being subject endowed with reason, and the reason is further assumed as unified and universal, it follows that one is expected to understand and judge a cultural specific practice independently of the particular cultural experience one possesses. The primary relation between a person and his/her particular cultural background is fundamentally a knowing process carried out by the reasoning power all the way down, wherein every thing empirical is defined against a knowing subject, which is by nature, a-cultural. Hence the cultural context can be grasped as the aggregate of different customs, norms and conventions, which can be further broken down into different properties. Therefore to be a Muslim is to acquire a gradual understanding of customs such as praying, fasting, veiling, and taking the pilgrimage, which can be compared in parallel with how a Chinese gets accustomed to distinctive Chinese practices such as eating moon-cakes during the Mid-Autumn Festival and lighting firecrackers during the Spring Festival. Such understanding does not only apply to the tangible aspect of the custom concerned, such as knowledge about which kind of cloth to buy and how to wrap the scarf in the case of veiling, but the intangible aspect as well, such as the theological meaning of covering during the prayer and religious interpretation of modesty. This way of approaching the question of background in general is characterized by its emphasis on the mental aspect of the issue, as represented by the subject's knowledge and judgment of one particular cultural custom. We may use the term 'present-at-hand' to describe how the cultural

entities can be understood under this approach, and this counters the ontological approach where the cultural entities are primarily understood as 'equipments'. The term 'present-at-hand' and 'equipment' is a direct borrow from Heidegger, and in his book *Being and Time* these two terms have been used to distinguish all pre-ontological inquiry from his proposed ontological inquiry. We have to give a closer look at the distinction Heidegger made between the treating entities in the world as 'present-at-hand' and as 'equipments'; for our current task of exploring the ontological significance of veiling depends on this very distinction. First of all, the term 'present-at-hand' is given by Heidegger in his exposition of how entities in the world have been understood by the pre-ontological analysis, namely, the way by which his predecessors deal with the question of being. The broad subject-object model as we mentioned earlier is one typical kind of pre-ontological analysis, wherein to treat a cultural entity such as a custom as 'present-at-hand' means to consider it as an object to be grasped by the ideal subject. Seen as the 'present-at-hand' entity, a cultural practice as veiling is no different from a particle in physics, both of which can be determined in terms of its concrete properties and relations with other existing objects inside the world. Insofar as the knowing subject and the knowable objects are concerned, the difference between a human practice and a natural object is not a difference of kind but rather the difference in concrete characteristics. Hence the human practice can be regarded as including more intangible features than the natural objects, or be considered as essentially dependent on the intangible protocol between people.[48] This comparison between the cultural practice and the natural object is only possible in the epistemological sense when we consider the nature of human being as mainly being the knowing subject. Hence the question of being, namely, question concerning what it is to be human, must be first answered before we get to understand different entities within the world, and it is possible that different answers to this question will lead to different way of understanding entities cultural and natural alike. Second, the answer given by Heidegger for the question of being resides in his use of the term Dasein. According to him, the question of being can never be adequately answered by the thinking subject, since entities within the world can never been encountered as the indifferent present-at-hand objects if they are not first understood as intelligible entities for our existence of Dasein in the first place. Different from the thinking subject reaching out to the worldly objects through mental activities such as perceiving, understanding and judging, Dasein is in every case indispensible for his/her world, and this interdependence between Dasein and his/her world is expressed by the Heideggerian term 'Being-in-the-world'. [49]Further, different from

[48] For Heidegger's exposition for the term 'present-at-hand', see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson(London: SCM Press LTD, 1962):67-69.

[49] For relevant exposition for the term 'Dasein' and its difference with other anthropological,

the thinking subject that conceives the worldly entities as mere present-at-hand objects, which are ontologically deprived of any meaning and intelligibility, Dasein and Dasein alone can disclose a meaningful world through concernfully dealing with entities within the world as equipments. Equipment here refers to the worldly entities as Dasein 'sees' it, which is different in kind from the isolable and meaningless present-at-hand objects grasped by the thinking subject. Equipments are not only wholesome by nature and thus can not be divided into isolable objects; they also for most of the time remain invisible if everything goes well with Dasein's dealing with the world.[50] Here we may use the example of book as an example to illustrate the distinction between objects for the thinking subject and the equipment for Dasein. Understood as an object, namely, a present-at-hand entity, a book can be said to have different properties such as weight, color, size, as well as serving crucial functions such as recording human knowledge, transmitting intellectual ideas and systematically summarizing the results of a research. These characteristics a book as an object normally has further defines a book as a book; therefore distinguishes it from other entities such as documents, magazines and personal computers which share some overlapping characteristics with it, and are still different from a book in terms of other properties. Yet when seen as a piece of equipment ontologically a book does not at all first come to us as a bare present-at-hand object endowed with different properties. Rather, it strikes us as the most appropriate entity to be expected under a particular situation. For instance, it is what we normally expect when searching for relevant information on a research subject, learning the written form of a theory in class and studying the work of a popular writer. In every case a book may appear as the most appropriate entity given what we are doing at that moment, and the 'function' that a book serves in each case does not have to appear as clear as properties if everything is going fine with that particular situation. For instance, if I am a scholar who used to do research based on books in the library, when starting to work on a project at hand I may simply check the bibliography online and then get a pile of references back from the library without noticing the function that a book as an entity delivers. In the case of a student, if the most common way for my learning a new theory in class is through reading a book together with the lecturer, naturally I can do everything from taking

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biological and psychological understanding of human being, see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson(London: SCM Press LTD, 1962):71-77. Dasein as Heidegger uses it in Being and Time stands both for the collective concept of human being and an individual case of being human; hence in this thesis I am also using this term in both referring to a group of people and a specific person. For a more detailed exposition on how is Dasein, as Heidegger's concept for human being, distinctive from other perspectives of human, especially the view of human as conscious subjects, see Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I*(Massachusetts: The MIT Press:1992):13-14.

[50] For definitive exposition for the concept of 'equipment' and its relation with Dasein see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson(London: SCM Press LTD, 1962): 95-102.

notes to raising a question without being unaware of the role that the book on my table plays. Even in cases when something unusual happens, like all libraries nearby suddenly shut down and no books are available, or in the second example the teacher decides to try the online teaching thus a real book is no longer needed, a person who is sticking to that situation will react by looking for substitutive information on the internet or adapting oneself to the new rules of online learning; in neither case the book has to be perceived as an object with distinctive properties. This is to say, if a person as Dasein is concerned with a more general sense of what is to be done within particular situations as mentioned above, for instance, getting some information in order to have a research paper written, or following the exposition of a teacher in order to comprehend a difficult theory, such concerns would never allow a book to be perceived as an isolated object with distinctive properties. Besides, as equipment the book is never understood as an object separate from other objects such as the library, the book shelves inside the library, the classroom, the table inside the classroom and etc. Rather, to define the equipment as holistic is to say that an 'equipmental whole' constituted by the library, the facilities inside the library, the classroom and etc have already been taken into account by Dasein who is coping with these different situations in order to get the task at hand done. Third, if the entity within the world for a being like Dasein can not be considered as the same with the present-at-hand kind of object, it follows that the meaning and significance of entity as seen by Dasein is not the same with the properties or attributes which we attach to the present-at-hand kind of object. As dicussed in the preceding point, equipments are connected by the series of practical manuscripts Dasein follows in a particular situation, which is termed by Heidegger as 'in-order-to' (like in the previous cases, to borrow the book from the library in order to finish a research project or to bring a textbook to class in order to follow the teacher's exposition), and the inter-connectedness between a stream of 'in-order-to' is further termed as 'assignment' or 'reference'. Further, we also mentioned earlier hat equipment is defined by its being most appropriate for this specific task, which can not be found with a general sense of property that an object processes. Further, if everything goes well for Dasein's carrying out a specific task, equipment becomes inconspicuous or even transparent. For Heidegger our being able to get around in our everyday world most of the time in such a transparent manner indicates a more basic sense of understanding that we as Dasein 'possess'. Different from the understanding construed as the mental capacity, this more primary understanding that Dasein depends on when getting around in the world constitutes the inconspicuous familiarity, that is unavailable for any conceptual thematizing or mental representation. It is based on this more basic sense of understanding that the significance of entities for Dasein arises. Just like under the subject-object model it is

the basic mental representation of oneself, namely, the identity that grants meanings to more concrete deeds of individual in the practice, ontologically speaking, it is the 'for-the-sake-of-which' that offers significance to the series of 'in-order-to' that Dasein performs on a daily basis.[51] Different from the more mental-oriented concept of identity that gives meanings to a variety of behaviors in a unilateral manner, the 'for-the-sake-of-which' does not, strictly speaking, impose any significance on the everyday activity of Dasein, nor does such a unified representation of oneself ever exist on the ontological level. Rather, the 'for-the-sake-of-which' is exhibited by and depends on the kind of transparent coping that Dasein performs in one particular 'in-order-to' after another. For this point we shall have a better grasp through my later analysis of the case of Saida.

After the brief exposition on Heidegger's vision for how the ontological inquiry into the question of background reveals answers different to that offered by the traditional subject-object model, we shall now come back to our case with the veiling and explore how is the ontological significance of this practice different from the variety of meanings that the veil is said to have. This leads us back to the signifier and signified story I have laid out in the beginning of the chapter by quoting from Jennifer Heath. It is one basic assumption of this signifying interpretation that the veil as a symbol bears interminable different meanings depending on the cultural background and personal experience. When it comes to our basic question in this chapter, namely, how can what termed as the 'cultural background' here be understood in terms of its relation with the individual, this assumption says nothing more than the formula of form and content usually expresses. That is , the cultural background determines how the same behavior of putting on a piece of cloth on one's head can be interpreted differently, and the varying individual experience makes more complex the final meaning the behavior stands for in each case. If we consider this formula as a mathematical equation, then it follows that the meaning of the veil can be calculated out rightly if we have adequate grasp of the determinants represented by the 'cultural background' and 'personal experience'. Here both the cultural background and personal experience express nothing more than the synthesis of manifold of empirical data of an ideal subject, i.e. the mental representation in one kind or another. If Heidegger is right in his criticism of the representation model thus defined, then it follows that such way of approaching the question of background will always pass over the question it claims to answer in the first place, for the background understood ontologically can never be reached through mental representation or anything like that.

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[51] For the exposition for the term 'for-the-sake-of-which' and how it is connected with the 'equipment' through the 'assignment' or 'reference' to 'in-order-to', see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: SCM Press LTD, 1962): 114-122.

Therefore the same putting on a piece of cloth on the head can never be said to represent different meanings under the Islamic and Chinese background, if to veil never means to perform something as definite as such a simple behavior in the first place, namely, in the ontological sense. This statement warrants more clarification. What do we mean that a definite behavior as putting a piece of cloth on one's head can never be found in the ontological sense? Further, how will the practice of veiling turn out to look like in the ontological setting as defined by Heidegger? In the following paragraphs I will attempt to answer these questions through examining how the basic understanding that Dasein has toward a practice such as veiling can be shown by the proper body distance that Tunisians keep between oneself and the veiled, and further, how the 'for-the-sake-of-which' as defined by Heidegger can be understood through Said's accounts.

First of all, as we have mentioned in the earlier account of Heidegger's main arguments concerning the question of background, the understanding that Dasein has at the ontological level for an entity is not anything like the mental representation as assumed by the subject-object model. Further, we have also mentioned that such understanding is based on the basic familiarity that Dasein has with his/her everyday world, which is for most of the time transparent. In regard to the veiling, this indicates that when the ontological significance is concerned the practice can not be thought as any sort of mental representation, namely, it can not be conceived as first having a cognitive grasp of what is performed by people around as the cultural custom then decide to follow it by doing the same oneself. The kind of acculturation or social learning assumed here requires rules and principles that are definite and systematic so that the mind can recognize and act upon, yet according to Heidegger nothing as definite as such can be found in the familiarity the basis of which entities are already understood for Dasein. Yet these expositions still seem too abstract to be grasped. After all, how can the familiarity as Heidegger refers to it become transparent to Dasein, and how can it reveals the more basic understanding that Dasein 'has' toward his/her world?

For the first point it will be helpful for me to bring my ice-breaking experience in conversations with the Tunisians as a telling illustration. Back to my field trip, it was my daily routine to ask every one I came across in the casual setting about the meaning of the veil in the Tunisian context, and for most of time people would think silently for a while, then gave answers such as 'this is Islam', or 'this is what Muslims generally do'. Some of them could be considered as the kind of information that people came up with casually, yet not all of them could be passed off as trivial details

unworthy of serious attention. In one case, I was visiting the market inside Medina (the 'Old City') with the accompany of my Tunisian friend, and we came across two old women dressed in the 'Tunisian hijab'(see the third footnote back to the introduction) inside a shop selling women's garbs. I went up to them and asked for the meaning of what they are wearing. Since they did not speak well in standard Arabic, my friend introduced me and my research project to them in the Tunisian dialect. Being warm-tempered as many other Tunisians they were apparently willing to help me out with my research question, yet neither of them came up with something more systematic than scattered words such as 'Islam' and 'God'. Noticing the confused look on my face, one of them tried to show me how the prayer is delivered when mentioning the word 'Islam', and another repeatedly chanted the praise of God with her finger pointing upward to the sky. How should such a reaction be considered given our proposed question about the basic familiarity? Judged by the informative aspect of their talk we may naturally consider this encounter as offering little useful empirical data. These two women appeared as having little to say about the veiling, or being restricted in their capacity of rendering the subject in an intellectual manner, yet we will be mistaken if we consider them as actually understanding little about the veil. The word understanding needs further exposition. In both cases they surely know quite well about how to pray five times per day, how to fast regularly a year, how to cover themselves carefully before going out every morning, and how to invoke expressions related to God to express their different emotions; all these could be accomplished with skillfulness after years of getting their way around in an Islamic country. 'Islam' or 'God' is in no case conceptual abstraction for them, since both have got so pervasively interwoven into the day to day scenario they are familiar with: the calling for prayer from the minarets in the early morning, the listening to the chanting of Qu'ran in every crowded market, and the referring to the greatness of God in countless daily chatting. Predominantly diffused in everything around them, 'Islam' can no longer be called a way of life; it is the life itself in every tangible aspect. From this perspective, the loss of words is not an indication of failing in verbal communication or the more intellectual way of thinking, but rather the insurmountable difficulty one faces when trying to distance oneself from the basic familiarity. Further, the overwhelming influence of this familiarity is arguably the reason that people I came across resorted to the most general kind of answers such as 'this is Islam' when being asked about the meaning of the veil. As we shall see further in the case of Saida, for some one having 'being a good Muslim' as the final 'for-the-sake-of-which', the practice of veiling is not only no more special than other daily 'in-order-to's that one does, but it can be entirely inconspicuous and unquestionable for the person concerned if everything goes as usual in a daily setting.

If the basic familiarity as we have seen in the preceding example can become transparent to a person getting intimately involved in one situation, how should we further comprehend the statement that this basic kind of familiarity has its own kind of understanding? If it looks like that every one is simply passively conforming to prevailing social norms, how should any understanding, which is generally associated with the active capacity of mind, to be said as exiting in this seemingly thoughtless conformism? To answer this question it will be helpful to look at how a proper body distance is kept between the veiled and others under the Tunisian context. In Tunisia people generally keep a certain body distance with a veiled woman in different social settings. Such kind of distance can be hardly defined in any accurate term, and will only be sensed once we socialize more casually with a veiled woman. Once joining a seminar organized by one Tunisian Youth Union in the capital, I discovered that during the seminar breaks the students gathered in the courtyard and chatted freely with each other, but a young man would naturally take a step back if a veiled lady jointed the conversation. This small response was hardly noticed by those present and the chatting generally went on without being disturbed in any observable way. This subtle body response that one has toward the veiled was further noticed in my getting along with two of my research assistants, who happened to be one veiled and one not. Whereas my unveiled assistant usually held my arms when walking with me and sat near to me in the restaurant, the veiled assistant seldom touched my body except during the hands-shaking, and during our chatting in Café she usually kept her chair at a certain distance to mine. This small difference in the body distance we kept with each was for most of time too trivial to be given any serious notice, yet for a foreigner like me it was nevertheless sensitively felt, perhaps out of curiosity. In the above two cases the body distance people keep between one and another can't be considered as something as rigid as rule or norm, for no one needs to pay any special attention to it at all in order to get the distance right. In every particular situation people know immediately how to position one's body with that of others without resorting to anything like rules. Rather, the proper body distance has already been achieved beforehand so that the normal social interaction between people can be carried out. This knowledge of appropriate gesture reveals a kind of understanding that is more basic than the formal form of mental representation, such as recognizing the meaning of the veil, or following the conventional norm regarding the veil. Further, if we have got Heidegger's vision regarding the 'primordial understanding' correctly, it will only make sense to further talk about any norm as such if people have already got this basic understanding of how to get along with one and another in the ontological sense. Unlike a norm which can be deprived of the concrete situation it takes place in individual cases, the understanding revealed by the proper body distance is an

indispensible aspect of every particular situation: it makes no sense to say that 'one step' is the norm if we are not referring to the courtyard chatting I happened to join in the first example; similarly it would be too inflexible to declaim that 'never holding a foreigner's arm' is the norm that my research assistant follows if I am not referring to my personal encounter with her. The primordial understanding that people possess in terms of their dealing with the veiled is in this sense, unique to every concrete interaction, and the unrepeatable nature of each particular situation makes it difficult to be considered as any norm or principle.

If as we have analyzed above, the basic familiarity that people have at the ontological level can turn out to be transparent for those involved, and the familiarity can further be considered to have its own unique understanding, as the example of proper body distance has revealed, then how can these insights help us with understanding the significance of veiling in the individual case? What does it mean to say that the practice of veiling signifies anything ontologically, if the significance as such is not to be understood any meaning induced from the mental representation, be it personal or cultural? To explore this question we shall first take a close look at how Saida talks about the meaning of the veil for her, and then we will see where her discourse is going to lead us. Saida is a high school teacher in her forties, and she started veiling since her adolescence out of personal will. Back to the beginning of 1990s she quitted the attire due to the pressure imposed by the governmental ban, and only recently she resumed the dress under the spread of hijab trend within the country. During our conversation, she was constantly anxious that my research focus on the veiling is too narrow and potentially misleading, and in her words "hijab is only one part of being 'mutatayynah'(pious or religious)", which can not be correctly grasped without a comprehensive view of Islam and the kind of life it prescribes. This point is closed based on another idea that Saida tried to get across to me, namely, for a devoted Muslim there is no real difference between ''bada' (worship) and 'hayah'(life), for the truly religious should always aspire to lead a life in accordance with what one's religious conviction requires. To her, veiling was no more special than observing the daily prayer, being sincere with family members, committing to her work diligently, and in the case with me, treating a foreign friend with respect and kindness. As she puts it, "when it comes to the details of being alive and being observant veiling is felt as natural as breathing and walking." How should we consider the interpretations Saida developed here around veiling, isn't this a telling illustration for how for some the practice constitutes part of their identity as being Muslim? Since the whole debate around the veil stems largely from people's holding on to different interpretations of identity, is there anything novel to be said about why people like Saida would feel the

veiling as an indispensible part of their life? My answer to these questions is, for sure the accounts given by Saida here can be read as the expression of how a cultural specific practice like veiling matters to those concerned, and how the identity of these people has been in turn determined by adhering to the relevant cultural practices. Yet like the traditional way of taking cultural context as an entity assigned to different individuals, to consider the preceding accounts as expressions of identity not only answers nothing about what the cultural context and identity thus referred actually are. But it totally covers the possibility of answering this 'what is' question due to its epistemological dependence on the subject-object model. Since cultural context thus defined is not any more than the manifold of cultural data assigned to an ideal subject, which can be further understood through the subject's cognitive power, the personal identity says nothing more than the a bunch of mental representations of oneself that can further determine the behavior one takes and the choice makes. However, insofar as our proposed task of exploring the ontological significance of veiling is concerned, the representational approach does not get us anywhere near to the question we face, namely, what does it mean to have a cultural context, and in this case of Saida, what does it mean to have a personal identity? In our preceding analysis of the basic familiarity and primordial understanding, the 'Islamic context' as the Tunisians live it has already turned out to be something new, which is shown as transparent and situation-dependent. It is predicable that the significance of the veiling, understood ontologically, is going to be something different from the personal meaning that we generally associate with the concept of identity. To see this we may start from the last point Saida mentioned previously, namely, veiling is felt as natural as breathing and walking for her. When placed in its original context, this analogy is not quite talking literally on how natural the veiling will make the practitioner feel, but rather pointing toward the transparent coping that Dasein does on the basis of his/her basic familiarity with the world. We will miss the point if we take this sentence as declaring the practical convenience that veiling brings to any Muslim woman, for the kind of naturalness that Saida refers to can not be read separately from her very personal project of being a good Muslim. We may think that the naturalness that Saida feels can probably be explained by her being growing up within an Islamic society and immersed for years in an Islamic culture, yet it is surely not the case that everyone nourished by the same broad social background will feel the same as Saida did. As our earlier analysis with cases like Sausa and Leila in chapter two has suggested, for some young people the veiling is not only felt to be unnatural, but highly troublesome for daily socializing. The clue for understanding the reason for Saida's feeling of naturalness resides in her mention of 'life as worship', and 'the veiling' as one part of this whole. For her being a good Muslim is considered as, in Heidegger's sense, the

final 'for-the-sake-of-which', that 'offers' significance for every little thing she does on a daily basis. We may translate her words into the Heideggerian ones to have a better grasp of how this works for her. She observes the prayer in order to be punctual, treats the family with love in order to be a good mother and wife, works hard at school in order to be a good teacher, accepts my interview with open-mindedness and veils in order to follow the proper dress code within her community. All these are done in her case for the sake of being a good Muslim. The for-the-sake-of-which 'signifies' in every case beforehand what is meaningful for Dasein to do in this situation, and the significance in turn firmly depends on the basic familiarity which is always available for Dasein beforehand. Therefore Saida's having 'being a good Muslim' as her 'for-the-sake-of-which' makes 'to veil or not' significant, and this significance in turn depends on a more general Islamic background where the practice is already understood. Given our preceding analysis, the understanding here means that in the case of veiling people naturally know how to keep a proper body distance with the veiled, and countless likewise daily details that can be disclosed under further Interpretation; this can not be considered separately from the countless daily situations wherein God is constantly mentioned in the oral language, the chanting of Qu'ran available in any corner of the city, the reminder of daily prayer from the minarets is broadcasted regularly five times a day, and the festival setting in the street during the Ramadan is set up annually. All this constitutes what is most familiar and environmentally available for Saida, so that it makes sense in the first place for her to have her 'for-the-sake-of-which' as being a good Muslim. Following this line of reasoning, ontologically it makes no sense for a Chinese to veil, because no such basic familiarity or primordial understanding can be found in a common Chinese society. This is so, because the 'for-the-sake-of-which' of Dasein relies on the basic familiarity that makes the concrete 'in-order-to' followed by Dasein at a daily basis intelligible.

Before moving to my conclusions, further conceptual distinction has to be made so that the 'for-the-sake-of-which' can be differentiated from the concept of identity. In the case of Saida, we may think it possible to simplify the exposition by saying that Saida's sense of identity as being Muslim gives meaning to what she does on a daily basis, and the veiling belongs to one of the practices that is constitutive essential for her identity. The identity thus understood indicates the mental representation of some sort or another, i.e. Saida has some sort of ideas about herself and projects these ideas on the things she does. Further, she uses these ideas to organize what she does so that the behaviors will become coherent and significant for her. Yet such mental projection and organization have no place in the case of 'for-the-sake-of-which'; in the case of Saida to say that 'being a good Muslim' is her final 'for-the-sake-of-which' does not

mean that she is using this idea as the guiding light to decide what is the best choice to make in every concrete situation. (In this sense we may think Saida is saying to herself in order to be a good Muslim I have to observe the prayers, behave honestly with my family and friends, dress modestly and etc.) The formal kind of definition for a 'good Muslim' is not at all applicable in this case, since the detailed situation that Saida encounters is far more complicated than any general moral guidelines can offer when it comes to her daily life. On the contrary, such a grand guiding principle will close off the actual possibilities that Saida faces in every arguably non-repeatable situation, making the flexible coping with it impossible. For instance, the general guideline of being a good Muslim may include something like treating the non-Muslim with respect, yet it does not at all offer any answer for more nuanced situations such as whether or not to accept the interview of a non-Muslim and whether or not to tell the interviewer the existing criticism concerning a religiously desirable practice. A top-down sense of identity won't help one in getting around in all these complicated situations. Contrary to the concept of 'identity', the 'for-the-sake-of-which' that one has does not decide the proper thing to do so that one can manage to achieve it. Strictly speaking the 'for-the-sake-of-which' is never going to be fully achieved through any formal procedure that subject to further breaking down into smaller steps. Dasein just has to stick to the particular situation and response to it, and keep doing this in an on-going manner constitutes to make the 'for-the-sake-of-which' of Dasein visible. In the case of Saida, she does everything from delivering the prayer on time to dressing modestly, from being nice to the friends to answering my question sincerely. In every case she is what she aspires to be, namely, a good Muslim. She will never be able to fully accomplish to be a good Muslim for it only goes on so long as she exists, namely, being able to take a stance in a new situations.

If I was successful in the previous analysis, then at this point we should be able to see that the ontological significance of a cultural practice like veiling is determined by the 'for-the-sake-of-which' of Dasein, and it is further based on a basic familiarity on the basis of which everything is already understood. According to the choice approach we have followed in the preceding chapters, the different cultural contexts is to be conceived as predisposed in an arbitrary manner so that the task of making a free choice through the universal practical reasoning is to rise above the predominating influence of one's own culture and think alternatively. Yet this assumption leaves the whole question of cultural context and our relation with it as individuals totally unsettled. In regard to the veiling this question can be taken as a question about the cultural and personal meaning of veiling. Most of the previous researches answer this

question by assuming a broad sense of subject-object dichotomy. Accordingly, the practice of veiling is seen as a present-at-hand entity the meaning of which is determined by the complex combination between cultural and personal factors. To put it in more correct terms, the same practice of putting a piece of cloth on the head is considered to have different meanings under different cultural contexts, and interpreted differently by different individuals. Hence, the question of meaning is answered in this way through resorting to the mental representation of an ideal subject, which makes it possible to comprehend the existing cultural norms and forming personal interpretations around it. Yet the ontological inquiry I proposed in this chapter is aimed at challenging this representational approach toward the question of meaning. If the representational approach were right, then it would make sense to declare that the practice of veiling has different meanings under the Islamic and Chinese context, or signifies different things to a Muslim and a non-Muslim. However, as we have already pointed out through exposing concepts such as 'the basic familiarity', 'the primordial understanding', and 'the for-the-sake-of-which', the ontological significance of one practice depends on the Dasein's 'for-the-sake-of-which', which further hinges on the basic familiarity. Therefore in the most primary sense the practice of veiling is unintelligible under the Chinese context where the basic familiarity is lacking. Ontologically, it might be intelligible for a contemporary Chinese young woman to live up to the standard of modesty by staying away from pre-marital sex, yet it is unintelligible that this Chinese lady chooses to wear a veil as expression of her modesty. Likewise, it would be lacking of significance for a non-Muslim to choose the veil, for in that case the 'for-the-sake-of-which' one has won't involve anything that makes the veiling meaningful.

Conclusion

The thesis starts with a recent hijab trend spreading among young Tunisians, and this case has raised interesting theoretical questions to be examined alongside the existing debate on the Islamic veil. In the preceding chapters I have examined two main theoretical questions: first, how should we understand the concept of 'free choice' in the individual cases of veiling, and second, what is the ontological significance of the veiling practice.

Regarding the first question I first started with the problems posed by some of my interviews with the Tunisian students, namely, although all of them choose to wear the hijab out of personal will, they were more or less confused conceptually when it comes to the reasons for their choice. Some of them were even actually burdened by the idea of '*fitna*' as it is popularly defined in the Tunisian context. This observation leads to my proposed rethinking of the concept of choice, i.e. whether the capacity of practical reasoning should be included in our judging of a choice made free, so that the person concerned not only has to be provided with external protection regarding the liberty of conscience, but is required to have a good argument for the choice made through reasoning. The quality of personal reasoning has not been given serious attention in the previous discussion of the veiling, and the point of contention has been the more general political meaning that the practice stands for, and the proper institutional arrangement regarding the practice. Consequently the wearing of veil has either been opposed based on its incompatibility with modern life or defended as liberating for those concerned in terms of the functions it serves. Yet discussing the question of choice at such grand level overlooks the complexity of situation when it comes to the individual reasoning over smaller decisions to be made in daily life. As I have argued in this paper, it is crucial to take into consideration this reasoning process since it determines primarily how conflicting ideas existing in the on-going debate has been sorted out in the personal case, and this further determines how well the individual will act consistently in reality without being self-serving or burdened by his/her unexamined beliefs. The critical examination of one's beliefs about the choice includes essentially the use of practical reasoning, which requires one to rise above the most familiar influences within the familiar environment and think alternatively how the principles one holds should be applied to a broader group of people. This alternative thinking is unfortunately in danger among most of my Tunisian informants, for whom the on-going warfare between the West and the Islamic world makes easy a categorical siding with Islam when thinking about sensitive issues such as the veiling. As a result it is difficult for those who are predisposed to defend Islam to spot the

fallacious arguments that widely exist in the popular preaching of veiling in the media. In the case of Tunisia this leads to the dilemma of hypocrisy that many veiled young women are faced with, which is resulted from, on the one hand, the spread of a rigidly defined idea of '*fitna*' in public discussion, and on the other, the lack of critical thinking on the part of the individual. The popular view of '*fitna*' requires the young women to observe a stringent behavior code, which not only includes more general moral traits such as being honest and moderate, but also specific rules such as not wearing make-up, not hanging out with boyfriends, and most importantly, abstention from pre-marital sex. Yet for most of the young students I know these rules are too draconian to be followed, and consequently many of them had to adopt a double standard in most of these matters in order to justify their occasional breaking of conventions. This leads to a prevailing criticism of the 'hypocrisy' of the veiled in the public discussion of Tunisia, which in turn exacerbates the guilt many of the veiled feel about themselves. In proposing for practical reasoning, I contend that to a critical reflection of the beliefs one accepts at one time will likely to reduce the predominant control that specious popular ideas generally having on us; through clearly sorting out of different assumptions behind the beliefs one is more likely to act flexibly in reality, and importantly, with well-structured convictions which can stand critique from a broader circle, thus promoting a constructive public debate in the long run. After all, as one important form of public discussion, the intellectual debate on the practice will lose its intrinsic value and fundamental function if it can not inspire the general public to use their own reason in joining a rational debate on issues that concern them intimately. Insofar as my proposal of practical reasoning as a universal human capacity is concerned, one important opposition is held by the cultural relativists. In regard of the veiling, they insist on the relative nature of any kind of standards we are using in judging a behavior or choice as right, and settle for the Islamic vision of 'rights' as being fundamentally different from the human rights as they are defined in the western context. Concepts such as 'modesty' and 'mutual complementariness' are usually mentioned by those arguing in this line, yet as I have pointed out in the critical examination of the popular religious preaching regarding the veil, when taken out of its original context and juxtaposed with some haphazardly selected 'western ideas', these concepts can not at all support the argument that Islam stands for an exclusively defined idea for human freedom and dignity. Further, in citing discussions of Barazanqi I have also suggested that the common ground can be achieved between the western idea of reasoning and Qu'ran-based interpretation of basic human capacity. Moreover, Barazanqi's emphasis of the crucial role of understanding one's role as '*mutaqqi*' in moral judgments has also supported my argument for the importance of practical reasoning in defining the choice one made as truly free.

The second question I have addressed in this paper concerns with the meaning of the veiling, especially, how the assumptions of different ways of interpreting the meaning can be laid out philosophically, and compared in terms of their explanatory power. In my discussion of choice, the cultural and personal meaning of the practice has been completely left out so that common ground can be achieved regarding the possibility of our being moral and the position of reason in this process. Yet the question of meaning is nevertheless crucial since it determines in the most primary sense, namely, in the ontological sense, how a practice like veiling is understood by people concerning themselves with it. Regarding the question of meaning many of the previous discussion on the veiling have adopted a broad sense of subject-object model in their viewing of the practice. According to this vision, the practice of veiling is considered as a cultural entity which can be interpreted differently, given different cultural contexts and personal experiences, and epistemologically an ideal knowing subject has to be presupposed to make such kind of interpretation possible. One basic implication of this approach is that the practice of veiling can be simplified into a present-at-hand entity, which is to be acted upon by determinant factors such as cultural context and personal experience. Hence it is reasonable to conclude that the same practice means differently for a Muslim and a non-Muslim, under the Chinese and Islamic context. Yet convinced by Heidegger's critique for limitations of the representational model, I am arguing that ontologically it is wrong to believe that the practice of veiling means anything at all for a non-Muslim or under an Islamic context. In order to develop this point, I have first introduced basic terms that Heidegger coined for the ontological Interpretation of the background question, suggesting that the question of cultural background is primarily a question of being, and in order to approach this question rightly we have to shift our view of human beings from the ideal subject to Dasein. Further, using examples from my field trip I have shown that both the cultural context and personal identity can turn out to be something quite different under the ontological inquiry. In the case of cultural context, my analysis of my ice-breaking process during the interview shows that ontologically the Islamic context reveals itself as the basic familiarity that is generally taken for granted by people living with it. This is in sharp contrast to the context understood under the representational model, namely, the systematic aggregate of rules and norms that can be grasped mentally by our cognitive power. Through the case of proper body distance that Tunisians keep with the veiled, I have further pointed out that the basic familiarity is to be taken as a blind kind of conformism, for it has its own kind of understanding which is more primordial to the mental kind of understanding we are familiar with in the representational story. Likewise the personal identity also suggests

something different under the ontological inquiry. In the case of Saida I have shown how having 'being a good Muslim' as one's 'for-the-sake-of-which' is different from a clear personal identity as Muslim, and further, how the ontological significance of the practice of veiling hinges on the 'for-the-sake-of-which' of Dasein. It follows that ontologically it is unintelligible for a non-Muslim to choose the veil, for the for-the-sake-of-which that 'determines' the significance of the practice is unavailable in that case. Likewise it makes no sense for a Chinese growing up outside the Islamic context to choose the veiling, since the basic familiarity that the practice requires in order to be intelligible ontologically does not exist in this case.

Further, I would like to make some remarks on the theoretical implications of the Heideggerian phenomenology that I have been talking heavily in the final section so that it can be connected with my earlier discussion on the political aspect of the matter. In the earlier parts of my paper, the question that I dealt with concern the question of choice with the aim to bring about a more sufficient definition for it. Three kinds of argument can be identified to answer this question in the existing literature that I have mentioned in this paper: first, there is the argument from a cultural-relativist stance, which admits the importance of choice in religious obligation, yet only allow those who accept certain metaphysical assumption concerning Islam, say, the existence of God or women are created to have certain natural functions, the opportunity to draw determinate conclusion on the matter of rights. For this argument, the norm of defining rights should be considered as relative to Islam, in the sense that only those who are currently within a circle drawn by the metaphysical beliefs are legitimate to say anything conclusive on individual rights. This makes the communication between the Muslim and non-Muslim community on this subject impossible, and leads to a sharp distinction between the Islam and western understanding of rights. I am arguing against this relativist stance for the reason that there is a shared human nature that all of us can find in common in virtue of one's being human, namely, we are needy beings who are capable of reasoning jointly with one another. Accordingly, to make the determinate appraisal of veiling exclusive to Muslims is theoretically implausible for the very process of defining the purity of Islam depends on referring all non-Islam elements, which requires a minimum degree of understanding beliefs and customs other than the Islamic ones. Not to mention that for the proponents of the Islam-relativism, they have to assume the use of reason based on the basic intelligibility among all humans, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, in order to make any meaningful disagreement with others. Without this basic intelligibility that is pre-secured by one's use of reason as human, it would be pointless to say that all of us can have a debate in any sense as a community, let alone to have disagreement or

consensus as results of such debate. Second, there is a consequentialist argument in favor of veiling as illustrated by the works of Muslim feminists that I reviewed in the first chapter. According to this argument, veiling should be allowed because it brings positive social and personal consequences for women. However, the consequence is produced by social conditions that are neither under control of a person nor fully justified in their own terms, and the evaluation of the consequence depends on needs and interests that vary from one case to another. This makes the observation of such consequence unlikely to sustain a normative conclusion that these feminists aspire to draw, namely, women should be given the right to choose their attire in accordance with their beliefs despite the concrete social circumstances they are subject to. To reach this agreement on this point we need a standard of judgment that is not circumstance-relative. As I have proposed, such standard can be found with the shared human capacity of reason, which requires a person to not adopt assumptions that cannot be accepted upon further reflection, and not to act on incoherent maxims (e.g. to condemn nightclub and enjoying going to it at the same time). Making these norms of reason a necessary condition for our defining of a free choice can effectively rule out the unnecessary confusion or incoherence as we have witnessed in the cases of my interviewees. Third, there is an argument for the personal choice regarding sensitive political practices like veiling developed by some proponents of political liberalism. According to this argument, the primary condition for the matter of choice resides in the external political arrangement, and the decision to veil should be said free insofar as some crucial political rights are made available to the person concerned. The individual responsibility for following some norms in reasoning is overlooked in this argument.[52] This not only leaves unclear how the initial consensus on the proper political arrangement can be achieved among people with different persuasions, but sets up no effective norms by which a person can arrive at agreement with oneself.

So far all my arguments are based on practical reason and its normative application in individual case, yet this would not be a satisfying reply for the question posed by the above three arguments, if I could not derive some exposition for the matter of meaning from my lengthy reference to Heidegger. Here I shall draw a tentative answer for this question. First, in the first chapter I mentioned the line of thinking that Said adopts in his Orientalism, and I also argued that to assume a systematic cultural prejudice has misleading effect on a person's judgment. In the case of my interviewees, this prevents them from seeing the matter from an alternative standpoint.

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[52] For example of this argument, see Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 4-11; *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 69-81.

As a result, cultural relativist thinking makes difficult any substantive communication between these young Muslims and people from other cultures. A basic assumption underlies the cultural-relativist argument is that a person has to have some sense of identity about the cultural self. In our case, this means that a person must first identify herself as a Muslim, or have some narrative about being a Muslim so that it shall make any sense for this person to choose veiling. On this reading, it is the conception that one has about one's identity that confers meaning to the action of veiling. However, our analysis on the 'for-the-sake-of-which' suggests that such an understanding of political identity is not what happens most primarily to a person. According to the Heidegger story, it is not the political identity that gives rises to significance of one's action. Rather, such identity would not be intelligible if the practice of veiling is not already 'understood' ontologically through a person's coping with the everyday world as Dasein. Further, the cultural background seen by Dasein is not equivalent to the cultural context that Said conceives as having determinate influence on one's political views. Just like the identity, the ontological background Dasein has is a basic familiarity that pervades the everyday world on which a person dwells, and it does not cause anything such as 'opinion' or 'viewpoint'. This conceptual way of summarizing what is going on only arises when there is something going unusual for one's everyday coping, so that a person may feel the urge to have a saying or expressing an opinion on the practice. (For instance, a person is urged to have a saying when being asked by me as a research to reflect on the significance of veiling.) Second, there is another response to the consequentialist argument that we can draw from the Heideggerian phenomenology. According to the latter, veiling can neither be grounded in an explicit intention to bring something about, nor can it be primarily justified by examining the empirical consequence such intention yields. The phenomenon of veiling goes one layer deeper than this intention story. In the ontological sense, to veil is not to have a specific intention to bring anything about, but rather to deal with the situation in a way that is most appropriate to one's given environment. Further, the process through which a person keeps her 'for-the-sake-of-which', say, to be a good Muslim carries on is not the same with having a consequence deriving from a specific intention. For the latter, an intention can be fulfilled when a desirable consequence is achieved. Yet for the former, since strictly speaking there is nothing to be achieved, there is nothing to be striving toward in the first place. Like all the activities that Dasein does, to veil does not bring any feeling such as fulfilling a religious obligation, following a convention or whatever. For the master level Muslim veiling shall be as ordinary and meaningful as all other activities brought forth by countless specific situations arising in one's daily life. It is through coping with all these situations with skillfully that the 'for-the-sake-of-which'

this person has can be 'preserved'. This raises another difficult problem: how can we decide such 'for-the-sake-of-which' said as failing in any sense if it is going on in an 'invisible' manner as I depicted here? Heidegger did not give a clear answer for this in his discussions. Given the ultimate persuasiveness that the 'for-the-sake-of-which' has in the everyday world upon which a person dwells; it is hard to say if it can be broken by anything inside this world. Does this suggest that it can be broken by 'pressures' from outside this everyday world of familiarity? It is possible. My own conjecture of the breaking of one's' for-the-sake-of-which' shall be something like to have an anxiety for a clear identity, or to seek anxiously an explication for what one does. (On this reading the case of Yosr that I mentioned earlier might be said as an illustration for the breaking down of having being a Muslim as one's 'for-the-sake-of-which' rather than living with it.)

Finally, there are several limitations of this research that I would like to mention. First of all, like many other empirical based research, this project is originally designed to be open-ended in the interviewing process, which makes it only possible to theorize questions revealed by the data afterwards in a retrospective manner. One basic problem imposed by this research method is that the data collected in the first place might turn out to be inadequate in fully supporting the arguments made. In my case it only came to me gradually through translating my interviews and sorting out all the fragmented view points that practical reasoning is severely lacking in most cases with my informants; therefore it is possible that after discussing with them the ideas regarding the veil more thoroughly they will be more consistent in the arguments made, thus realizing the weakness of some beliefs they adopted in the first place. Therefore it is possible that I wouldn't be so harsh in my comment on them if the conversations we had were more modeled on the Socratic dialogue from the outset. Second, given my admittedly short stay in the country and predisposed focus on the interview, it was practically impossible for me to observe more deeply the daily life of Tunisians. This sets limits for the kind of examples that I could come up with in illustrating my points in the ontological analysis during the final chapter. The details would be much more vivid if I had been doing a longer period of live-in research in the country, and they will serve better in delineating how an average Tunisian is living ontologically with the practice of veiling. Finally, theoretically there is a deep-seated chasm between the discussion of choice based on practical reasoning and Heidegger's proposal of ontological analysis, which is beyond my ability to address in this short thesis. If one followed Heidegger all the way in insisting the essential position of the questions of being, it is questionable whether it is appropriate to argue for any kind of human nature at all. Yet it is one basic assumption of the choice approach that we

human beings are capable of reasoning in moral matters, and the practical reason gives better insight for how we should behave as rational animals. This assumption could be contrary to Heidegger's negation of any kind of human nature thus defined. The full implications of this theoretical division between the rational approach toward the moral question and the ontological insight into our capacity of being moral would be a subject for further inquiry in my future research.

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